

FROM PARADISE TO PARADIGM

A STUDY OF TWELFTH-CENTURY HUMANISM



by

WILLEMEN OTTEN

BRILL

FROM PARADISE TO PARADIGM

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WILLEMIEN OTTEN



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For Maud and Fu Cheng

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PREFACE

This book has been rather slow in coming. This is due in part to the travails of postmodern scholarship, which arose from my traveling existence. Wandering scholars can be found as much in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as in the early twelfth, which made them famous. An odyssey of global proportions took me from Amsterdam to Loyola University of Chicago, where I taught from 1990 to 1994. In the open atmosphere of the theology department of Loyola I was received as a friendly European only to leave as a familiar Chicagoan. My friendly rapport with my department colleagues and friends at Loyola, especially Joep van Beeck S.J., as well as my contact with Bernard McGinn at the University of Chicago helped me to overcome the culture shock of an academic immigrant. At Loyola I first started conceiving the current project relating to twelfth-century intellectual culture, theology proper being too narrow a term for the texts I wanted to study.

After moving to Boston College in 1994, I completed the article 'Nature and Scripture: Demise of a Medieval Analogy,' which has been slightly reworked in chapter 2. I then continued my twelfth-century labors by turning to William of Conches, all the while enjoying the cordial companionship, both intellectual and social, of many scholars at Boston College in the theology department and among my colleagues of the Medieval Studies program. Chapter 3 is a substantial reworking of an article that came out of various lectures during my Boston College-period. It was fittingly published in 2000 in a Festschrift honoring my former mentor L.M. de Rijk as 'Plato and the Fabulous Cosmology of William of Conches.'

Two American universities and an American daughter later, I suddenly found myself back on Dutch soil, having been appointed to the chair in the History of Christianity at Utrecht University in the spring of 1997. At Utrecht I have steadily worked on this project, being joyfully interrupted by the arrival of a Chinese daughter and, more structurally, by the demands of numerous administrative duties, such as the implementation of major educational reform plans in the theology department. I was happy to return to Boston College in

the summers of 1998 and 1999, as I worked on chapters 1 through 4. Both of those times I seriously wished I could have stayed longer, while I was at the same time eager to go back home. With the U.S. having become a home away from home, I often find myself torn between two worlds, meanwhile straddling to give the third, the world of historical Christianity, its proper scholarly due. Chapter 5 came out of a Dutch-Flemish conference on the history of Pelagianism in the fall of 2001 and was originally published as 'Fortune or Failure: The Problem of Grace, Free Will and Providence in Peter Abelard.'

In terms of church-historical scholarship Utrecht has proved to be an increasingly good place to be. The way in which colleagues in church history from the department and from the Catholic Theological University at Utrecht have started to collaborate closely has yielded greater mutual understanding. Inspired by my ecumenical experience in the U.S., I had the good fortune to first try out this strategy with my colleague Eugène Honée of the KTU, and it has been pleasantly and successfully continued with Gerard Rouwhorst and Daniela Müller. The first combined project of our joint research group on *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation* was published in 2004 and a second conference on *Iconoclasm and Iconoclasm* is already planned for 2005. It allows us all to grow in scholarship, while promoting the study of church history as a valuable contribution to theology. The fact that numerous graduate students have chosen to specialize in this area is a source of both joy and pride. Nienke Vos, Annelie Volgers and Arwin van Wilgenburg, working in periods that stretch from the early church to the twentieth century, are assets to the profession as well as to the department. Above all, they are fun to work with and provide a certain measure of level-headedness. The church history group in the theology department, to which they belong together with my colleagues Frits Broeyer and Willem van Asselt, serves as a welcome sounding board for historical and theological research. I am grateful that Joke Spaans has recently replaced Frits upon his retirement. A special word of thanks goes to my assistant Gerben Roest for his diligent care in putting the finishing touches on the manuscript and preparing the indices.

The concentration one needs as a scholar needs to be broken regularly so as not to turn into overspecialization equaling intellectual isolation. My departmental colleagues Anton Houtepen, Geert van Oyen and Henk Tieleman have each taught me much about how religion and theology can and should be studied at the beginning of

the twenty-first century. Although many of our debates were not immediately applicable to the twelfth century, the lightheartedness and spirited nature of our ongoing conversation radiated much energy. Providing me with much-needed context, it allowed me to develop my own vision on the use and abuse of tradition, making it much more gratifying to keep the memory of the past alive, even in the case of a more distant one. Currently, I am fulfilling the role of dean of the theology department, facing the challenge of reconciling a venerated past with the demands of a less prominent future, at least on the surface. The intellectual material we as a department hold in store as well as the rising importance of religion in post-modern society makes it extremely interesting to unite the old and the new. In the same way twelfth-century intellectuals must have been eager to reconcile the ancient and the modern.

I want to thank Arjo Vanderjagt for his steady support of this book and his readiness to publish it in Brill's *Studies in Intellectual History*. Two friends have read along with me during much if not all of this project. I am thankful to Charles Hallisey of the University of Wisconsin for an abiding friendship across the globe. To Burcht Pranger of the University of Amsterdam I am forever grateful for a friendship whose span extends even further, while its nature remains remarkably down-to-earth. On a local French scale, Pamela Bright Kannengiesser, Charles Kannengiesser, and Russell Moroziuk have turned our last few family summers into true paradisaical bliss.

I used to value friendship above family ties. The experience of family life has taught me that it is in fact very possible to combine them. Dick, Maud and Fu Cheng are living testimony that some ideals in life can simply be realized. For that I thank them.

Utrecht University

Willemien Otten

INTRODUCTION

UNDERSTANDING MEDIEVAL HUMANISM

This book studies twelfth-century humanism in the guise of an all-embracing discourse in which the human and the divine are found to be on equal footing. Perhaps it is more precise to say that the book studies a certain climate of thinking and doing theology, which began to grow in the early Middle Ages to climax in the twelfth century and vanish soon after. This climate of thought escapes narrow definition. By suggesting an ambience it cuts across genres and defies stereotyping. Categories like monastic and scholastic theology to describe it do not really apply in what is generally a pre-scholastic period, one, moreover, in which the walls of the monastery were by no means impenetrable. Even the use of the term theology itself is suspect. For it suggests a kind of clarity and a territorial and disciplinary awareness vis-à-vis philosophy and other sciences that did not yet apply. I therefore prefer to use the term ‘theologizing’ to describe what actually takes place in these texts, as they contain a mixture of rhetorical and grammatical commonplaces interspersed with moments of sharp reflection of a broadly theological and philosophical nature. Alongside initiating us into a climate, this kind of theologizing introduces us to a culture that once flourished but has somehow disappeared. Or rather, it faded away towards the end of the twelfth century, without having been properly defeated or principally condemned. Slowly but surely it was simply declared out of style. Elements of it or even whole strands of reasoning did become transmitted, however, in Latin but also in the vernacular. Traveling onwards, these parts of a former culture found new audiences in certain kinds of late medieval poetry. As they had been severed from their original intellectual and historical context, it became much harder to understand their full story. The present book tries to remedy that by telling that story.

In its once booming and blooming phase, it seemed that various intellectual ingredients were powerfully combined to make for a whole whose integrity was reflected in a certain ambience even when resisting precise analysis. In terms of researching this culture, then, this

means that we had to approach it indirectly, as the disintegration of its constitutive ingredients would not necessarily guarantee success in the form of greater insight into its former appeal.

What then was its appeal in the first place and why did I decide to label this culture as a form of medieval humanism? Since we already begin to tread onto unstable ground here, it may be useful to resort back for a moment to the familiar study of Richard Southern in the '70s where he used the term for the first time. In his collection of essays of the same name, he sees *Medieval Humanism* as displaying three characteristics. It reveals (1) a sense of the dignity of human nature, (2) a sense of the dignity of nature itself, and (3) a sense that the order of the universe was intelligible to human reason, with humanity placed at the center.¹ All these aspects feature prominently in the present study, but it is especially the unconventional way in which they could be combined, their interrelation that is, which gave this kind of literature its unusual appeal and specific allure.

One of the ways in which this appeal has often been interpreted is to see it as a kind of product or side effect of the optimism that is associated with the idea of the twelfth century as a renaissance. This is undoubtedly one reason for its telling indication as medieval humanism. There is by now almost a century of scholarship on the theme of the twelfth-century renaissance, which makes it hard to contradict what seems like established tradition. Thus we know that the famous Dutch historian Johan Huizinga contemplated the idea of writing a book on the twelfth century including the intellectual or humanist aspects of its culture. In many ways he regarded this century as a direct contrast with the period of the late Middle Ages, about which he wrote so movingly in *The Waning of the Middle Ages*. There intensity of emotions of the most diverging kind, the presence of death and darkness, here rational reflection, optimism and a belief in a kind of cultural and social constructivism, an intellectual style, tied to the making of civilization and of humanity through education and the promotion of chivalrous ideals. In the 1930s Huizinga gave a series of lectures at the Sorbonne to analyze its pre-gothic spirits. Dealing with Abelard, John of Salisbury and Alan of Lille, he somehow regarded their collective thought as an intellectual uni-

¹ See Richard W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), 29–33.

verse of sorts.² The connection between the twelfth-century renaissance and medieval humanism is taken a step further still in Southern's unfinished trilogy on scholastic humanism, which he started in the mid-90s.³ Here he defines medieval humanism as having found its true calling and fulfillment in the elaboration of scholastic ideals of clarity.

Be that as it may, I have opted for a rather different and more roundabout approach. Taking its starting-point in a reflection about the relationship between form and content in twelfth-century intellectual culture, the present study prefers to understand its appeal above dissecting its perceived message of enlightened optimism and scientific progress. In my view what matters more in these texts than content, keeping them together in an unbreakable bond, is their texture, as only this texture reflects what I have indicated to be their particular ambience. It appears as if in these texts God, nature and humanity enter into a triologue of sorts. This triologue, which reigns over many subjects relating to the essence of all three of its participating entities, seems to have as its main goal not the matter of establishing identity—a metaphysical game of *who is who*—but to bring out and bring about the archetypal relatedness of all kinds of knowledge with respect to human nature. Rather than giving us a better sense of the factual make-up of the universe, the created status of humanity or the nature of the transcendence of the divine, the authors studied here seem above all keen on engaging the divine and the universe in a joint conversation. Thus their aim appears to have been to keep the debate open rather than settling it. Settling the debate would be the equivalent of ending it, thereby cutting short a conversation in which there might be much more to say. It would foreclose any sense of intellectual development, furthermore, by accepting solutions long before the questions had been properly stated, thought through and integrated.

² Johan Huizinga was first inspired to read twelfth-century literature by his reading of Remy de Gourmont's *Le Latin mystique*. A brief outline of his intended study can be found in a letter to his friend Jolles from September 22, 1927 (Correspondence II, 168). As a kind of preparatory study he gave three lectures at the Sorbonne, Paris, on pre-gothic spirits in April 1930. Dealing with Alan of Lille, John of Salisbury and Abelard, these studies can best be seen as sketches for his later *Homo Ludens*. See A. van der Lem, *Johan Huizinga. Leven en werk in beelden en documenten* (Amsterdam, 1993), 39–41, 219–22.

³ See R.W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*. Volume I: Foundations (Oxford, 1995); Volume II: The Heroic Age (Oxford, 2001).

In my view, then, two aspects stand out in trying to get a better sense of the texture of early medieval texts and, in particular, of a group of related twelfth-century texts. The *first* is the centrality of human nature, as a feature already revealed by Southern. As I see it, rather than humanity's dignity *per se*, what matters before all is the self-evidence with which the human voice is considered a natural partner in all these conversations, perhaps even the dominant one. There is simply no conversation possible without the implied need to answer to human questions. Humanity's sense of responsibility in this respect does not just center around the understanding of its own place in the cosmos, but also holds when the object seems farther removed from direct human interests. This becomes especially clear when we look to one of the most remarkable concepts to be encountered in this kind of literature called *natura operans*. *Natura operans* indicates a level of independence of the universe from God, as creation departs from its divinely controlled created status to work out its own goals, especially insofar as they relate to nature's detailed governance of the universe. Thus the universe is seen as setting and defending its goals more or less on its own, that is, according to the profile of its inherent rational make-up. This leads to a particular meandering kind of natural or cosmological discourse. As one encounters it frequently in the twelfth century as an integral part of its humanist outlook, it cannot so easily be relegated to the status of a mere preamble to thirteenth-century natural science. There is simply too much interweaving with the arts of rhetoric and grammar going on, defying any and all questions of nature's direct use, to see this discourse as grappling for scientific advancement alone. More especially, from the perspective of its human discussion partner nature is above all perceived as another voice in the dialogue, not an object to be controlled.

As an example we may look to William of Conches' *Philosophia* I, XI § 39, where he discusses God's creation of the world from the elements. Talking about the fine points of God's omnipotence in controlling the elements, he comes to reject some positions as unacceptable, such as the one that God needed chaos to show us his goodness by ordering it. In his remarkable robust style William asks to whom God actually needed to demonstrate his goodness. To the angels? But they knew the divine will from nature and grace already. To man perhaps? But he was not yet there. Working up to his own position, William then states the following:

So from the inordinate lying around of the elements (not the chaos that was, but the one that could have been) God returned the elements to order, as if when through the admonition of a friend of ours we escape something that would happen had he not warned us. When we say: 'He has liberated us from this evil', we do so not because first there was this evil and subsequently he liberated us, but because had he not been there, the evil would have befallen us.⁴

Associated with the fact that in this analogy God poses as the friend and chaos as evil, with creation functioning as a kind of liberation, the rhetorical density that speaks from this passage is striking. As can be seen from this passage, William is not necessarily interested in explaining the details of God's scientific actions to humanity. On the contrary, he radically dismisses the thought that God went about creation somehow to show (off) his omnipotence to either the angels or humanity. Just as divine omnipotence does not equal an overdose of random power, so in William's explanation rhetorical style, even when allowing for embellishment, should not give rise to rhetorical overkill. What God establishes in creation according to William, what he does particularly in creating the elements, is in fact to take a major initiative that enables him from now on to enter into regular contact with the world. This contact is only the first of many contacts, as William's natural philosophy abounds in rhetorical associations and natural metaphors. As all this can obviously not be done without keeping a close eye on his audience, he must try to make clear in some detail to his readers what this step entails.

On the surface all the above aspects and motives find a relevant expression in the fact that twelfth-century cosmology was often done in dialogue form. This is not only because of the conventional Platonic reasoning whereby the dialogue format is seen as guaranteeing progress through dialectical argument, but also, in the case of William, because the cosmological conversation in which the divine has entered can only proceed when a set degree of reciprocity is present. Naturally the dialogue itself takes place between two human discussants, but somehow it seems to facilitate the drawing near of the divine as well. The required degree of reciprocity in dialogue demands God to be there as an implicit presence rather than an external factor, as without his presence *natura operans* lacks a life-giving principle. Endowed with this life-giving principle, however, the universe can do without

⁴ See William of Conches, *Philosophia* I, XI § 39, ed. Maurach (Pretoria, 1980), 35.

explicit divine support for its unfolding. All the while, the role of humanity is that of a sounding board providing exclusive and constant continuity in what would otherwise be a random mixture of images, much like the random mixture of elements William radically rejected. The task of the human interpreter is thus to bounce off ideas, to try and test them, to unpack and repack them in a constant trial-and-error discourse—another reason behind the preference for dialogue—so as to study the universe first and foremost by prolonging conversation. Meanwhile, humanity is instructed about its own proper place in it not by seeing the cosmos primarily as a functional setting but as an integrative and esthetic one. To the extent that the arguments brought forth in the discussion are both beautiful and meaningful, they begin to carry weight as well, as truth and persuasion are coextensive. At the same time it seems that the complexity of insight gained from this kind of discussion is seen as directly contributing to the solidity of the truth that is attained.

For the *second* aspect of this humanism I here like to refer to a certain relaxed and intimate tone or atmosphere present in twelfth-century discussions. They are conversations that somehow continue a certain intimacy and directness, which we are more used perhaps to associate with monastic dialogue. The difference is that the intimacy of tone is not found in the conditioning factors or in a kind of spiritual setting but materialized in the texture of the conversation itself. In the case of Abelard, we see how the conversation can even touch on the very heart of Christian redemption, as he introduces his famous question on the incarnation:

In what respect have we been made more just through the death of the Son of God than we were before, that we should be set free from punishment? To whom is the price of blood paid that we be bought free, unless to him in whose power we were all along, that is of God himself, who had committed us to his executioner. For not the executioners but the lords exact and receive the price for their captives. How then did he release the prisoners for this price, if he himself first demanded it or instituted for the captives to be liberated?⁵

Strikingly, but perhaps not surprisingly in light of the earlier passage from William of Conches on creation, it is not so much the object of conversation here, Christ's incarnation and redemption, but

⁵ See Abelard, *Commentary on Romans* II (3:26), ed. Buytaert (Turnhout, 1969), CCCM 11:117.

again the texture of the dialogue that is of special importance. Abelard enters in a rhetorical dialogue with the divine whose role is as much that of a sounding board for the author's arguments as the author is a sounding board for the divine, notwithstanding the latter's persistent role as sovereign God governing the universe. What is of crucial importance for a twelfth-century author like Abelard, however, leading him to ask pertinent questions, and can be used by us to define medieval humanism more precisely, is the casual tone of an ongoing debate that speaks from such passages. In my opinion only this casual tone could allow for a situation whereby the self-reflection of meaningful dialogue suddenly broadened to serve as a solid basis for reasoning with, rather than about the divine. When Abelard's reasoning soon after the above erupts in a question (*haec et similia non mediocrem mouere quaestionem nobis uidentur*), this question represents in my view as much an intense culmination point of human-divine contact as the beginning stage of scholastic disputations. Historically it is at least both.

To be able to reduce speculative and metaphysical problems to the rhetoric of conversation and to turn concentrated conversation into a true meeting of the human and the divine is what I see as the particular humanist quality of the literary texts that are studied in this book. To value the theologizing ambience needed for that, quite apart from any appreciation for the individual positions involved, is what it wants to be all about.

The particular story of the book involves an exposition of the rise and fall of this humanism. It unfolds as follows. After a general setting of the stage in the first chapter in which this humanist outlook is described as the memory of paradise, we see in chapter 2 on 'Nature and Scripture' how the intellectual balance between these two interdependent sources of revelation slides in favor of the former. Scripture and exegesis become sidetracked as specific samples of theological discourse that are no longer immediately congenial to intellectual progress, as had been the case before. Interestingly, this leads to remarkable oddities of interpretation, in the sense that where certain poets do still send out scriptural messages, as I hold Alan of Lille to be doing in his *Plaint*, they no longer seem to be received, much less digested. In chapter 3 on 'Opening the Universe' we trace the scientific cosmology of William of Conches, which I hold to be as much a matter of literary achievement and hence to be called an art, than foreshadowing the natural philosophy of the following

century. In chapter 4 on 'Opening the Mind' a similar story is told about the idiosyncratic development of Abelard's theologies as giving us an insight into his own theo-logic. In conformity with what I argued above, this chapter is as much about the disappearance of theologizing as about the logical progress in theology. Chapter 5 deals with Abelard's attempt to continue the values and insights of a monastic ethics in a post-monastic world and its resulting frustrations. At the same time, it also shows how the exhilarating optimism of Abelard's project to open the mind finds a down-to-earth corrective in his moral philosophy, which may well contain some Stoic elements that have been part and parcel of Christian resignation since this religion's inception.

The last two chapters draw some provisional conclusions, as the story this book has meant to tell nears its ending. Chapter 6 'Tragedy in the Twelfth-Century Imagination' contains an analysis of Bernard Silvestris' poem *Mathematicus*, which reflects on suicide as the positive choice of a free individual, albeit a literary choice. Chapter 7 finally on 'Paradise and Its Discontent' tries to come full circle by comparing the biblical image of human sinfulness or Adam's fall with the more apposite twelfth-century notion of Nature's tear. This allows us to capture in a single image congenial to the age both its well-known celebration of the universe's cosmological wholeness and its growing awareness of its inherent fragility. It discloses not just how Nature's integrity can easily be defiled but also how her former ally, humanity, threatens to become ranked among her greatest enemies. In the comparison between Alan's *Plaint of Nature* and his subsequent *Anticlaudianus* the shift from celebrating *Natura's* comprehensiveness, even if she struggles with a flawed human nature, to the need for corrective divine intervention through human recreation, is described in some detail. Rather than facing God, humanity now faces the cosmos as well, as it does not just find itself rejected by Nature as its former partner and ally, but also loses ties with the idea of paradise as its natural habitat. Although some interpreters stress the optimism of Alan's vision of a New Man as marking the height of twelfth-century educational optimism, in my opinion his allegorical silence speaks volumes about the dissolution of the underlying ambience. As it was this ambience of medieval humanism, of humanity's natural belonging in a divinized universe, which this book attempted to sketch, in my view the birth of the New Man embodies quite literally the end of an era.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM PARADISE TO PARADIGM. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF TWELFTH-CENTURY HUMANISM

I *The Quest for Universal Nature*

This book will make the case that an important segment of the learned discourse of the early Middle Ages, in the period connecting the Carolingian to the twelfth-century renaissance, can best be understood by focusing on its broad humanist outlook.¹ Trying to sketch the characteristics of this outlook more fully, this chapter will show how the discourse in question appears to have been patterned on a powerful combination not only of the abstract and the concrete, of idea and image but, before all, of a unity of form and content.² Having properly assessed its achievements, the book will

¹ Naturally, one cannot use the term 'medieval humanism' without referring to the late Sir Richard W. Southern. Further on in this chapter I will discuss his *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, Volume I: Foundations (Oxford, 1995). Here it suffices to state my general indebtedness to his earlier collection of essays *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970). In his essay on medieval humanism (pp. 29–60) he defines medieval humanism as displaying three characteristics. It reveals (1) a sense of the dignity of human nature, (2) a sense of the dignity of nature itself, and (3) a sense that the order of the universe was intelligible to human reason, with humanity placed at the center (pp. 29–33). I accept the above definition with some modifications, relating to his critique of the School of Chartres and his assumed antithesis between scientific and literary humanism. We will return to Southern's view of the school of Chartres below.

² This position has been phrased elegantly by Peter Dronke. His seminal study *Fabula. Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden, 1974) opens with the following statement: 'There is a sphere of medieval writing in which the abstract and the concrete, ideas and images, are inextricably conjoined. The first great monument in this sphere is Scotus Eriugena's *Periphyseon* (completed in the years 864–66); later, in the twelfth century, it extends to writings as diverse as William of Conches's *Dragmaticon*, Bernard Silvestris's *Cosmographia*, and Hildegard of Bingen's *Liber divinorum operum*. . . . They are achievements not only of the rational intellect but of the fictive imagination. Their cosmological insights are nourished by imaginative springs as much as by the disciplined sources of abstract thinking. There is a realm where sacred vision and profane myth can combine with analytic thought, poetic fantasy with physical and metaphysical speculation' (p. 1). Apart from Hildegard whose texts, while likewise humanist, betray additional characteristics related to her monastic ambience and female authorship, the present study will treat the authors mentioned at some length.

next argue that the incipient separation of form and content in the twelfth century led to an ever widening discrepancy between the creative images used and the corresponding reality evoked in and by them, thereby heralding the ultimate demise of this discourse. As this discrepancy grew ever more visible, resulting in compositional cracks which became more and more difficult to conceal, these texts eventually lost the power to hold their audience captive entirely. We will analyze this process of literary deconstruction or self-destruction by looking to a variety of twelfth-century texts, as we will attempt to trace how their at one time attractive humanist outlook faded slowly into oblivion.

To begin the process of evaluating the various characteristics that distinguish these so-called humanist writings which dominate the period stretching roughly from John Scottus Eriugena to Alan of Lille, we have to become attuned first of all to the peculiar 'theologizing' nature of their discourse. By this I refer to the fact that many of the texts from this period possess an unusual dynamic literary quality, as they put forth a world view that is both ethereal and comprehensive. By subsuming this under the heading 'theologizing' here, it is not my intent to privilege a particular viewpoint or doctrinal preoccupation as typical of this world view, even though many of the themes on which the book dwells surface in the formal theological debates of the period. Nor do I wish to set up a tension with what I have called their overall humanist outlook. Specifying the discourse of these texts as 'theologizing', however, helps to bring out how their struggle to balance form and content was ultimately motivated by a deep desire to uncover the source of the universe's unity as one linking God and creation. The desire to reveal the world as organically tied to its Maker provides the spark, so to speak, which set the minds of these authors ablaze. Specifically, it inspired them to engage in an audacious experiment of mixing and matching various literary genres and, especially in the twelfth century, nascent disciplinary approaches. This experiment, which seems especially daring from a later viewpoint, may in turn well have reinforced the particular humanist quality of these texts.

There is little doubt indeed that the minds of this period repeatedly caught fire. For it is clear that the drive to present an integrative survey of the entire universe—as one emphatically including God—in a single magnificent glance forced them to stretch their imagination to no small degree. To get a first insight in what was

intended, let us just look to the opening phrase of Scottus Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, that magnificent dialogue between a Carolingian master and his student, which is arguably the most monumental work discussed in this book. The *Periphyseon* begins as follows:

Master: Often as I ponder and investigate, to the best of my ability, with ever greater care the fact that the first and fundamental division of all things that can either be perceived by the mind or transcend its grasp is into things that are and things that are not, a general name for all these things suggests itself which is *PHYSIS* in Greek or *NATURA* in Latin. Or do you have another opinion?

Student: No, I definitely agree. For when entering upon the path of reasoning, I also find that this is so.

Master: Nature, then, is the general name, as we have said, of all the things that are and that are not.

Student: That is true. For nothing can occur in our thoughts that could fall outside this name.³

A few remarks may help to illustrate the enormous amount of energy that is generated once the mind's imagination is unleashed, as seems to be the case here. In the space of just a few lines, Eriugena is able to summarize the entire program of the *Periphyseon*'s five books that are to follow, in which he will take his readers on an intellectual rollercoaster through the mechanics of *natura*. Despite the formulaic quality of the opening phrase,⁴ it is clear that the energy that is generated here springs ultimately from his own mind, for his text hinges on that very premise: *Saepe mihi cogitanti* . . . (Often as I ponder . . .). What sets Eriugena's text apart from other analytical texts in the Middle Ages, however, giving it a stunning imaginative twist, is that he does not appear to perceive the limited scope of the human mind as a hindrance, obstructing or derailing the investigation which he has just launched. On the contrary! Far from trying to tailor the scope of his investigation to the limitations of the human mind—as we can be certain that he is well aware of these—Eriugena reveals

³ See Johannes Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* I 441A, ed. Jeauneau, CCCM 161: 3; trans. PP I, ed. Sheldon-Williams (Dublin, 1968), 37.

⁴ It should not be forgotten that Eriugena plays with a Ciceronian turn of phrase here (cf. e.g. *De oratore* I, 1), derived from the classical tradition. It is typical of an early medieval thinker like Eriugena that he is able to transform a stock phrase from the classical tradition into the motto of an originally medieval 'humanist' program.

instead a remarkable confidence in the power of human rationality by following precisely the opposite approach. In his judgment, the very initiative by which the human mind enters on the path of rational investigation sufficiently warrants the conclusion that the mind is not just capable of understanding its own limitations, but that it may even go so far as to confront and transcend them. However ignorant the students of any master, they can all be taught to go down the path of reason.⁵ As the *Periphyseon* convincingly demonstrates, it takes but a single human mind to scour all of *natura*. From the work's opening onwards, therefore, Eriugena will steadily employ the concept of *natura*, which develops into a sort of short hand term for his entire intellectual project, to denote the inclusive reality of all things.

Yet the *Periphyseon*'s prologue offers us just the beginning of this project. Due to its limited capacity, Eriugena quickly realizes that the human mind can survey *natura* only by means of a roundabout approach. That may well have been the reason why, in a next step, he prefers submitting *natura* to a process of division, separating the things that are from those that are not, i.e., God, instead of merely defining his central concept. Resorting to such an indirect approach permits him to use the mind's potential more creatively. Notwithstanding its limited powers, the human mind can serve as a convenient tool to pry open the broadest possible field of research, targeting even what lies beyond its grasp. While Eriugena will always be keen on safeguarding *natura*'s reality as an inclusive one, he also shows little hesitancy integrating God with the mind's project. Honoring God's transcendence of humanity's mind and senses, however, he insists that only the divine can be properly adorned with the epithet of 'non-being', as he pledges his unflinching loyalty to the *via negativa* of Dionysius the Areopagite. It is as if his imagination, like

⁵ According to *Periphyseon* IV 765C–767D, ed. Jeaneau, CCCM 164: 35–39, in a passage on the human mind, it is clear that despite the mind's simple and unadorned nature the aspects of skill (*peritia*) and art (*disciplina*) are inherent in it. Yet there may be situations in which these aspects are temporarily unavailable, as in the case of immaturity, mental illness etc. All human beings are created fully rational, therefore, even though a reform is necessary to remove the clouds of moral ignorance and forgetfulness of self, which have befallen humanity on account of human sin. See on this point, W. Otten, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden, 1991), 172–89.

that of other leading minds later on, finds just the right amount of room to maneuver in the space that opens up when definition yields to division. As may be expected, room to maneuver is key when it is left up to the imagination to compensate for the shortcomings of the abstracting mind.

Given the above, it should not come as a surprise that the journey to God on which Eriugena and other early medieval minds embarked cannot be reduced to a straightforward ascent. Clearly, their project was not that of an *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, as undertaken by Bonaventure in the thirteenth century. In spite of the 'theologizing' nature of these early medieval texts, it may even be doubted whether the direction of their quest was predominantly vertical. It is not so much the divine goal of the investigation that made the authors' quest a fascinating one, but increasingly also its lateral expansion.⁶ In a move that is specific to this humanist sphere of medieval writing, it appears that the two are directly proportionate. Hence, the near-infinite height to which these authors aspired by contemplating the divine is reflected more or less directly in the near-infinite circumference of the universe that they described around them.

The mentioning of this last point merits further comment here, as through it new and unheard of opportunities opened up before the exploring and imaginative mind, as opposed to the abstracting, rational one. In the end, it seems the analogy between God's infinity and that of the universe, on which many of the texts at hand tended to draw often and most likely deliberately, could not fail to produce lopsided comparisons involving unequal entities.⁷ Having received little attention before, when properly elaborated these comparisons

⁶ For reason of the interdependence of cosmology and anthropology, I find it difficult to consider Eriugena a mystic, in contrast to such scholars as Kurt Ruh and, to a lesser extent, Bernard McGinn. See K. Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*. Erster Band. Die Grundlegung durch die Kirchenväter und die Mönchstheologie des 12. Jahrhundert (München, 1990), 172–206 and B. McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. Volume II: The Growth of Mysticism. Gregory the Great through the 12th Century (New York, 1994), 80–118. McGinn's definition of mysticism as 'primarily an ecclesial tradition of prayer and practice nourished by scripture and liturgy to foster awareness of whatever direct forms of divine presence may be available in this life' (p. 81) corrects more experiential, less historically accurate definitions. But it does not account for the universe's lateral expansion as an increasingly significant side effect of the quest for God in the early Middle Ages.

⁷ When I speak of God's and/or nature's infinity or near-infinity here, I refer to their particular perspectival quality as regards their inherent susceptibility to

opened up a new vista to the imagination, one which involved the possible reintegration of God and creation. The view that this restoration might be brought about by a mere noetic act was to have a dramatic and electrifying impact on early medieval thought culminating in the twelfth century. For that reason a brief assessment seems in order here.

The following scenario typically describes the kinds of problems and possibilities conveyed by this unequal comparison. From the outset early medieval thought seemed to operate on the assumption of a great chasm separating God's apparent infinity, reflective of both his perpetuity and his transcendence, from that of the universe. As the product of God's creative power, the latter had to succumb to the former. For being created and finite, it could not prevent the imposition of external boundaries. Observed from the perspective of the senses and the abstracting mind, however, the universe suddenly appeared infinite also, as it likewise set in motion the power of human inquiry. Even so, there always remained the risk that a discrepancy might disrupt the correspondence between the infinity of God and that of nature. Moreover, the indirect approach of the mind did not coincide completely with the universe's divine embrace. For while the mind and the senses could indeed survey universal nature, as if capable thereby of assessing its infinity, they still lacked the creator's ability to pinpoint either its beginning or its ending. As Bernard Silvestris would state a few centuries after Eriugena: 'For the universe is a continuum, a chain in which nothing is out of order or broken off. Thus roundness, the perfect form, determines its shape.'⁸

literary interpretation. Hence, the term infinity here is not to be taken in the later sense of a divine ontological status but rather as a term indicating their intrinsic resistance to any and all definitional boundaries alongside the concomitant unsuitability of any linguistic predicates to describe them. See *Periphyseon* I 499D, CCCM 161: 80; trans. PP I, ed. Sheldon-Williams, 167: 'For God is without limit and without form since He is formed by none, being the Form of all things. . . . For the supreme Cause of all things is without form and limit because of its eminence above all forms and limits. . . .' For an analysis of later, mostly scholastic discussions of divine infinity, see Leo Sweeney S.J., *Divine Infinity in Greek and Medieval Thought* (New York, 1992), 289–470. For a broader cosmological approach, see P. Duhem, *Medieval Cosmology. Theories of Infinity, Place, Time, Void, and the Plurality of Worlds*, ed. and trans. R. Ariew (Chicago, 1985), 3–136.

⁸ Cf. Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, Megacosmos IV 9, ed. Dronke (Leiden, 1978), 118–119; trans. W. Wetherbee, *The Cosmographia of Bernard Silvestris* (New York, 1990), 89. See also F.A. Yates, *Lull and Bruno. Collected Essays*, Volume I (London, 1982), 106, for an enlightening illustration constructed from John Scotus Eriugena on the Primordial Causes and the Circle (figure 2.1).

The above reflections give us a first clue as to how the authors discussed in this book tended to go about their task of representing reality. It is as if to them the infinity of the universe, whose creativeness suggested closure rather than endless progression, harbored underneath its claustral nature also an alternate principle, i.e., that of continuous gyration. Unfolding from principle into mechanism, the universe's infinity slowly began to encroach on the divine, as both embodied a similar sense of being open-ended rather than self-enclosed. Given that for most of our authors the desire to investigate reality sprang ultimately from their imagination, it is not surprising that the difference between the universe's horizontal and God's vertical infinity became increasingly blurred, if it did not disappear completely. The purveying eye of the rational imagination, which acted as a self-transcending principle even while remaining firmly nested in the finite human mind, would simply blend them into one. After all, for those using the motto *saepe mihi cogitanti* as the point of departure for their investigation of reality, it makes little difference whether the infinity they encounter is one of kind or of degree, as long as it has the sought-after effect. This explains why the mere illusion of infinity sufficed to expedite the deeply desired unity of God and the world. Indeed, all that was needed to set the mind ablaze was a spark.

II *The Return to Paradise*

It appears that still more can be said to flesh out the humanist outlook of the intellectual discourse that this book wants to explore. Notwithstanding my earlier remarks about its 'theologizing' nature, it is not my intent to narrow the debate on twelfth-century intellectual culture to a discussion of the period's doctrinal developments, even though in the individual cases of Peter Abelard and William of Conches these will indeed be touched upon. Rather, I wish to comment on the numerous insights these texts can give us about the intellectual atmosphere of the period. If we take seriously the unique combination of reason and imagination on which they are patterned, it is evident that we cannot undertake a serious discussion of their form—meaning their dynamic quality and their fundamental openness—without commenting on the corresponding reality which they mean to evoke. Judging from their perceived commonality in desiring the unity of God and nature, we may not be too far off the

mark when we decide to pull these texts together as making an important contribution to the larger medieval debate on and functional understanding of the notion of paradise.⁹ Within this context, I have chosen to focus on the return to paradise, therefore, as the theme which best captures the humanist agenda that underlies their authors' quest for God.

But how can the notion of paradise help us to clarify this humanist sphere of medieval writing?¹⁰ Specifically, what does it add to the sense of cosmic unity implied by Eriugena's *natura*, which embraces God's transcendence and eternal power of creation alongside the universe's lateral expansion? On the face of it, perhaps not all that much, inasmuch as presenting the search for unity as a quest for paradise does not drastically overturn our outlook. Yet grouping these various texts from Eriugena through the twelfth century under the one rubric of a return to paradise has important advantages. Two of these are worth mentioning here, especially since they will surface in more detail further on. Aptly, the first comment I wish to make harks back to the form of the texts to be analyzed, while the second focuses on their content.

Let us briefly touch on each of them. As said, the first deals especially with the form and to a lesser extent the content, of their quest for cosmic unity. As much as Eriugena and others like Bernard

⁹ It is significant that the famous study by J. Delumeau, *History of Paradise. The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition* (1992; New York, 1995), while focusing on the medieval and early modern period, does not discuss the literature studied here. For an older study of paradise focusing on the exegetical tradition, see R.R. Grimm, *Paradisus Coelestis, Paradisus Terrestris. Zur Auslegungsgeschichte des Paradieses im Abendland bis um 1200* (München, 1977). Grimm regards the medieval exegetical tradition as building on the antinomy between the biblical creation story and Hellenistic philosophy. Behind the medieval tradition he sees two important turning points, i.e., Philo of Alexandria's allegorization of paradise and Augustine's turn to the literal and historical truth of paradise, with Eriugena as an anti-Augustinian exception, see Grimm, *Paradisus Coelestis, Paradisus Terrestris*, 171–73. As will be made clear below, the present study aims at broadening the use of the term paradise beyond the scope of biblical exegesis, employing it as a heuristic tool to unlock the 'theologizing' hermeneutics of early medieval texts.

¹⁰ See also the chapters on Nature as goddess (pp. 116–37) and on the ideal landscape (pp. 191–209) in E.R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948; 10th ed., Bern, 1984). Part of the reason for my enterprise here to study these texts as paradise-literature is that it allows us to end the artificial segregation of different natural aspects, as found in Curtius, using them instead as building-blocks from which to construct a coherent picture of universal nature.

Silvestris and Alan of Lille may have indicated the harmonious balance of a divinely structured universe with the cosmic term *natura*, the way in which these authors conceived and envisaged the universe was to a large extent shaped by scriptural impulses. This may help to explain the mirage-like quality which *natura*, especially in poetic texts, appears to exude. Whether portrayed as concept or as goddess, *natura* continues to haunt the human imagination, even though or perhaps precisely because she constantly eludes any and all attempts at definition. She has her own story to tell. The dynamic story of *natura* might easily be mistaken for a failed utopian dream, when its analysis is confined to that of a mere philosophical abstraction. Instead, the continued injection of scriptural language and imagery in her vocabulary keeps her message of prophetic urgency alive by adding and deliberately leaving open the possibility of actual realization. Even in the case of an ethereal and supposedly wordly poem like Alan of Lille's *De planctu naturae*, with Nature personified as the maiden of pagan myth who is victimized by humanity, the only way to make sense of the inordinate degree of embellishment with which the poet sketches her is by regarding it as a sign of hope, i.e., the lurking hope that she may one day be restored to her original splendor. We will come back to the remarkable parallelism of Nature and Scripture that surfaces here in the next chapter, as we will see how twelfth-century authors strained themselves more and more to maintain a workable balance between nature's power of evocation and her prophetic role.¹¹ Here we will focus only on paradise.

By depicting *natura* in a scriptural light, even when at times that light shines so dimly as to be barely noticeable, the medieval authors studied here seem to play on her limit-like quality, as for them the universe of nature comes to radiate near-eschatological fulfillment. It is as if the infinity of the divine begins to spill over, endowing the universe with a semi-divine glow. Lighting up the contours of

¹¹ G.R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible. The Earlier Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984) generally argues that a deeper sense of Scripture gave rise both to a new exegetical practice and to a more thorough study of theology. These same new developments, however, would ultimately also undermine what she aptly characterizes as the broader, early medieval exegetical practice, which originates in Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* and is marked by a strong awareness of the correspondence of words and things and the mediating role of signification (pp. 51–59). Evans' study does not pursue the demise of this earlier practice.

natura, this semi-divine glow represents the picturesque scene of paradise at daybreak.¹² With the sun gently rising on the dawn of human history, the days have not yet taken on their distinct character, each of them associated with a series of well-defined accomplishments and failures. It is as if in many of our texts we find ourselves in the shadowy wings of history, where the faint morning light makes it impossible to discriminate between the blissful imperfections of well-meaning human reason and the baneful effects brought about by human sin.

My second point goes straight to the heart of these texts, as we must still probe deeper into the nature of the paradise that is evoked. What kind of paradigm underlies their desire to project paradise as a standstill era of eternal bliss? For now, it appears we do best by continuing our discussion of its biblical character. Why is it that these authors project such an image and why the focus on return? As can be illustrated from Eriugena's concept of *natura* uniting God and creation, it is clear that the return to paradise as a viable theme rests on the presupposition that God and creation ultimately belong together. Taken out of context, this presupposition can easily degenerate into a facile sort of pantheism.¹³ What prevents the authors under review from indulging in this, however, keeping them constantly on guard, is the fact that the path towards paradise is ultimately a historical one for them. This should not be taken to mean that they believe in a linear progression towards the paradisaical state as the goal for human society. But it does mean that there is a temporal dimension to their ideas by which where one finds oneself in relation to one's goal and how much farther there is to go can be measured. Time, in other words, opens up the possibility of bridging the distance between the material world of creation and the transcendent creator. It thereby endows the idea of *natura*, emphatically embracing both, with a unique perspectival quality. Unlike in a pantheist universe, where the outward lack of order disguises what is a

¹² This semi-divine glow of paradisaical light offers a more adequate explanation than the often-heard reproach that this kind of literature was unorthodox, leaning toward ideas of emanation and suggesting pantheist tendencies. The latter idea suggests a hard and fast distinction between pagan and Christian literature that overlooks the twelfth century's classical revival and generally does not seem to apply to the literary sensibilities of the age.

¹³ For a discussion of Eriugena's alleged pantheism, see D. Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 84–89.

static model underneath,¹⁴ the sense of an impending return to paradise sets us on a journey from past to future. With both the past and the future open to interpretation, the journey's course and direction are left primarily to the imagination. This requires a great deal of precision and moderation, both literary and moral, on the part of the authors of these paradisaical texts. Precision is needed because, in order to make clear how creation and creator belong together, one needs to be able to assess the exact distance that separates them. Moderation is needed, because they cannot run the risk of getting ahead of themselves, thereby misjudging the various intermediate stages of the return to paradise. Considerable patience is required, as they need to pull back nature's individual folds and creases in the order according to which she chooses to unravel her mysteries.¹⁵

To the authors representing this sphere of medieval writing, finally, paradise is neither a place from which humanity originally came nor one to which it is eventually bound to return according to the pre-ordained mechanics of a divine plan. That would violate the dynamics of *natura* as a coherent yet elusive concept, thereby subjecting the process of paradisaical restoration to forensic principles. Rather, paradise represents the confluence of an ideal time and a perfect place to which their texts alluringly want to invite us back. To the authors analyzed here paradise forms the nexus where God and the world, more specifically God and humanity, can finally meet on equal footing, as joint contributors to the harmonious equilibrium of the universe.

The splendor of this universe is such, however, that at times the authors' attempt to evoke it threatens to overwhelm their poetry totally. As a result other, more directly pertinent questions seem to

¹⁴ As an interesting kind of counterfactual against the suspicion that twelfth-century thought is heretical, we find William of Conches in *Philosophia* I, XI §§ 35–39, ed. Maurach (Pretoria, 1980), 33–36 adamantly refuting the idea of twelfth-century Platonists that before creation there must have been chaos. Arguing against an *inordinata iactatio* of elements as an actual reality on which God then conferred order, he held that God created precisely by building on the elements' natural qualities. See further below, chapter 3, p. 93 n. 23.

¹⁵ Nature somehow seems to absorb within herself the dynamism that is usually found played out in the tension between time and eternity, promise and fulfillment. This same dynamism is played out differently in the visual imagery of early medieval Benedictine monasticism, where the monastery is found embedded, *pli selon pli*, in a wider landscape, its stately nature contrasting markedly with the inner drama of the monks' life. See on this M.B. Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought. Broken Dreams* (Leiden, 1994), 85.

become totally obliterated, thereby fueling suspicions of heresy. The question how the world came into being as the contingent effect of a free and omnipotent creator, for example, the answer to which accorded early Christian literature its strong anti-gnostic sentiment,¹⁶ has now lost most of its fascination. What matters is to carry out the poetic injunction of restoring paradise to its former glory. With the pulsating rhythm of time moving us from past to future, it is the hope of our poets to describe it so powerfully that we are allowed a glimpse of its radiant light in the mirror of the present. After all, the road to paradise is traveled under the guidance of their imagination.

III *Paradise as a Human Abode*

What the splendor of paradise looks like, to catch at least a glimpse of it, has been elegantly expressed by Bernard Silvestris, whose *Cosmographia* may well be the apex of twelfth-century nature poetry. In painting his portrait of the megacosmos, as he calls it, Bernard's paradisaical description of nature interlaces the account of nature's mythical beauty with several references to the contemporary landscape of twelfth-century France.¹⁷ As such his paradise comes remarkably close to the historical present. At the same time, however, his poem marks an important stage in the transition to Alan of Lille's *De planctu naturae*, which we noted earlier as an instance where the poet chooses to depict nature's splendor as tragically ravished by human violence. In Alan the notion of paradise is largely pushed back to the bygone era of a mythical and moral past. This raises the question of how the desire to give an accurate representation of nature, which we have summarized as the quest for paradise, can yield such contradictory viewpoints. In the following analysis we will show that these two cases are perhaps not so diametrically opposed as seems to be the case at first sight. What ties them together is that

¹⁶ An important role in the opposition against gnosticism was played by Irenaeus. See E. Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge, 2001), 51–74 on God as one creator and the emergence of *creatio ex nihilo*.

¹⁷ See e.g. Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, Megacosmos III 260–264, ed. Dronke, pp. 110–111; trans. Wetherbee, 81: 'The Seine wells forth where a warlike land has spawned great dynasties of rulers, the lines of Pippin and Charles. The Loire shimmers where the city of St. Martin lies between starry waters and brightly tinted fields'.

in both cases humanity is cast in the odd but crucial role of being spokesperson and interpreter of nature's destiny at the same time. But how can these roles at all be reconciled?

As a fair interpreter of nature's destiny, humanity can only be seen as somehow apiece with it. This is where the authors under review face perhaps the greatest difficulties, as it is ultimately left up to their own imaginations whether and how to glorify or defile nature. Either scenario presents them with a curious disjunction between on the one hand *natura's* aura of integrity and wholeness, and on the other a disturbing inadequacy on the part of humanity to sustain them. Obviously, there is a much greater degree of moral guilt involved in Alan's *Plaint*, with the human assault on virginal *Natura*, than in Bernard Silvestris' paean to the universe. But even in Bernard's more propitious scenario human beings never quite succeed in their role as inhabitants of a perennial paradise. To illustrate this, let us look to the unusual comment with which Bernard concludes his Eden-like description in *Cosmographia*, Megacosmos III 317–338:

But still nearer to the dawn and the abode of Eurus, in the flowering bosom of the earth there lies a region upon which the sun, still mild at its first rising, shines lovingly; for its fire is in its first age, and has no power to harm. There a tempered heat and a favoring climate impregnate the soil with flowers and rich greenery. This little retreat harbors the scents, produces the species, contains the riches and delights of all regions of the world. In this soil ginger grows, and the taller galbanum; sweet thyme, with its companion valerian; acanthus, graced with the token of a perpetual blossom, and nard, redolent of the pleasing ointment which it bears. The crocus pales beside the purple hyacinth, and the scent of mace competes with the shoots of cassia. Amid the flourishing wilderness strays a winding stream, continually shifting its course; rippling over the roots of trees and agitated by pebbles, the swift water is borne murmuring along. In this well watered and richly colored retreat, I believe, the first man dwelt as a guest—but too brief a time for a guest. Nature created this grove with affectionate care; elsewhere the wilderness sprang up at random.¹⁸

'In this well watered and richly colored retreat, I believe the first man dwelt as a guest—but too brief a time for a guest'. This incidental comment by Bernard Silvestris accurately captures the melancholy mood with which twelfth-century thinkers came to review

¹⁸ See Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, Megacosmos III 317–38, ed. Dronke, 112–13; trans. Wetherbee, 82–83.

humanity's paradisaical past. The first human being dwelt there as a guest, not a resident, his stay even briefer than that of a regular guest. If anything, this comment suggests that Adam never made himself fully at home in the garden which Nature had so lavishly outfitted.

In its melancholy tone, Bernard Silvestris' comment stands in sharp contrast with the earlier tradition of paradise interpretation. Thus in the fourth book of his *Periphyseon* Eriugena gave his support to Augustine's *City of God*, where the latter had explained that the Genesis' story of paradise points indeed back to an actual historical past. Upon closer scrutiny, however, one sees how Eriugena, as an experienced teacher in the liberal arts, already questions Augustine's well-known position. Approaching the matter through grammar, he comments that Augustine did not say: 'Adam lived in paradise (or 'had lived')' *Vixit homo in paradiso (uel 'Vixerat')*, but only stated that: 'Adam began to live in paradise, began to live in the enjoyment of God, began to live without any want' (*Viuebat homo in paradiso, uiuebat fruens deo, uiuebat sine ulla egestate*). Scratching the surface of Augustine's grammar even further, Eriugena then reaches a conclusion that resonates rather closely with Bernard's more poetic insight:

It is as if he (scil. Augustine) said that the first man commenced to live in Paradise, commenced to live in the enjoyment of God, commenced to live without any want. This class of past tense is called by accurate observers of the different significances of the tenses the inceptive: because it signifies the inception and beginning of some action which has not by any means reached perfection.¹⁹

Clearly, Eriugena leaves even less room for speculation than Bernard with his passing reference to Adam's stay, since in the Irishman's view the first humans never spent actual time in paradise. For him, human history tells only the story of exile, as Adam fell immediately upon being placed in paradise. Given the difference between the wooden explanation of a schoolteacher like Eriugena and Bernard's rich poetic language, their convergence on this point, as both ultimately deny the historical truth of an actual paradisaical past, is especially striking. It makes clear how both these authors ultimately use this denial—which appears to be by design—for literary purposes.

¹⁹ See Eriugena, *Periphyseon* IV 808D–809A, CCCM 164: 95–96; trans. PP IV, ed. Jeaneau and O'Meara, 159.

Their intent is to create a similar effect on their audience, i.e., the effect of exhortation. Instead of dwelling on the past, readers are encouraged to transfer their expectations to their own lives, with the authors guiding them to try and determine whether human efforts will ever be able to attain the paradisaical state. Far from detracting from *natura* as a universal concept, this literary use of paradise as a filter for human ideals of perfection adds to her role as a valuable and indispensable tool of the rational imagination.

In shaping their discourse of paradise, it is clear that most of the authors analyzed here are interested in keeping all interpretations open. This is especially true of the actual realization of paradise, as this would be a historic first. Being among the foremost intellectuals of their age, moreover, they tend to do so by engaging in what they do best, i.e., to write imaginative texts that keep their readers constantly on edge. Their texts draw us invitingly into a delicate world where image and reality are hard to distinguish, as more often than not we find the demarcation-line deliberately blurred.

To the extent that this corpus of learned literature represents a sustained endeavor, the peculiar nature of its humanist program sets it apart from both the patristic project preceding it and the scholastic project, which would soon follow. It should not be forgotten, however, that the comprehensive program of these early medieval intellectuals has important elements in common with each. With the church fathers, these authors share the drive to use the imagination as a constructive tool in theologizing. Until scholasticism changed the practice of doing theology altogether by reifying it, Christian authors had always been interested in finding holistic ways of reflecting on the relationship between God and the world without undue regard for a narrowly moral or overly literalist following of rules.²⁰ Bernard and Alan's unbridled straining after effect allows them to engage in

²⁰ See G.R. Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology. The Beginnings of Theology as an Academic Discipline* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 8–56. Insofar as Evans discloses a close correspondence between the educational development in the various medieval schools and the increasing formalization of theology as an academic discipline, I largely agree with her position. Yet her picture is on the whole too organic, in the sense that she sees the arts forcing authors to refine their theological speculation in a 'school' sense as a matter of consequence. Allowing little room for the more imaginative approach to theology, in my view Evans, like Southern, overlooks the fundamental ambiguity inherent in the twelfth century's transition from a broadly theologizing to a more disciplinary, theological language.

the flexible alternation of reason and imagination, of form and content, in ways that should not be unfamiliar to readers of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*. With the scholastic authors, on the other hand, these early medieval intellectuals share the drive to try and bring about more precision and clarity in the learned discourse of the period. But while scholasticism eventually settled on the adoption of a stringent philosophical method, i.e., the new Aristotelianism or *logica nova*, the authors under review here constituted in some ways a kind of rival movement, to the extent that they steadfastly refused to attune the pulse of their literary texts to the drone of any pre-ordained categories, however freshly discovered. While the use of such excellent philosophical tools would certainly further the clarity and efficiency of the new school disciplines of theology and philosophy, they also ruled out any and all possibility of catching *natura* in full flight. By solidifying the divide between God and creation, they eliminated the possibility of a perspectival approach.²¹ While some of the authors we will discuss did indeed experiment with the new Aristotelian concepts to capture the intricacies of *natura* even better,²² they felt at liberty to do so without sacrificing what attracted them to this concept in the first place: its organic vitality. In an era that came to witness the formal disconnection of the liberal arts from the disciplines of theology and philosophy, they distinguished themselves through their unvarying attempts to fit the divided reality of creator and creation in a single frame of reference. In this distinction lies their contribution to the intellectual culture of the period.

²¹ This is one of my objections to scholastic clarity, so praised by R.W. Southern. See his *Scholastic Humanism*. Vol. I: Foundations, 4–5 for a succinct definition of the scholastic program: 'In principle, they aimed at restoring to fallen mankind, so far as possible, that perfect system of knowledge which had been in the possession or within the reach of mankind at the moment of Creation. . . . In order to do this, it was necessary to bring together all surviving records of ancient learning, to clarify them where they were obscure, to correct errors caused either by the corruption of texts or by the only partial understanding of their ancient authors, and finally to systematize the results, and make them generally accessible throughout western Christendom'.

²² As we will see in the individual chapters, this was true for both Bernard Silvestris and William of Conches. See e.g. B. Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century. A Study of Bernard Silvestris* (Princeton, 1972), 112–18. On the upheaval that the entry of Aristotle in the twelfth century also caused, see E. Maccagnolo, 'David of Dinant and the beginnings of Aristotelianism in Paris,' in: P. Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), 429–42.

IV *Imagining the Return*

The concept of universal nature used by early medieval intellectuals as we have explored it so far is clearly a dynamic one, its dynamism fueled by their constant drive to unite God and creation. Often this drive takes the form of a journey, not a pilgrimage,²³ with creation portrayed as yearning to minimize the distance that separates it from its maker. But the idea of a unified cosmos at the end of this journey can be an effective goal only as long as the initiative remains firmly in human hands. This is the strategic relevance of Eriugena's use of the Ciceronian motto *saepe mihi cogitanti*. In the absence of a clear alternative approach, for the scholastic method was not fully hatched until the late twelfth century, this road of the rational imagination, however diffuse and circuitous, sufficed for most of the leading minds of the age, to the point of inspiring some of them. Moreover, given the tradition from which these early medieval authors came and the resources at hand, it was the only method available to them. Pursuing the ascent towards God and the inquiry into nature as separate tasks would have the severe disadvantage of launching them not just on an infinite, but a truly unending quest, thereby frustrating any attempts to reach a harmonious equilibrium. The latter remained their aim throughout.

Thus it was clear to them that the journey to paradise could only be undertaken from the human vantage point. Despite the fact that humanity never actually dwelt there for long, if mankind dwelt there at all, as Eriugena, Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille each suggest in their own way, it seems nevertheless fitting to speak of a return to paradise. At stake in the debate concerning paradise is not the claim to reality, even though most of our authors wish to lodge the alluring possibility of a paradisaical future in their readers' minds, but rather the endless possibilities of interpretation it opens up. Thus we have the odd situation that only through the notion of return can it be properly conveyed that humanity's future is open-ended. In this respect it should not be passed over that the notion of return adds considerably to the complexity of their humanist program. While the

²³ As a more technical Augustinian term relating to humanity's course in life, *peregrinatio* does not cover the journey of the rational imagination I want to discuss here. I take this journey in the broadest sense, which includes but is not necessarily limited to the medieval theme of *homo viator*.

idea of an open future has the alienating effect of making the goal of their quest more distant, it is by keeping the intellectual and moral memory of paradise alive, on the other hand, that these intellectuals are inspired to hone their imaginative skills in ways unseen before. It is because the idea of paradise can only be reconstructed from memory, as these early medieval minds all had in common that they were reared on the deposit of scriptural images, that in the end they simply cannot avoid seeing the journey towards it as a return, even though it is a return to a place that is utterly unfamiliar, be it not unknown.

As this book will argue, the peculiar appeal of *natura* as a kind of paradisaical image, hovering between Nature and Scripture, between historical reality and literary archetype, underlies the cosmological preoccupation apparent in so many writers, from Eriugena in the ninth to Alan in the late twelfth century. Even though in what follows we shall have to pay attention to the intricate mechanics of the budding natural sciences in the twelfth century, or analyze the new ways of ethical and intellectual decision-making in the same period, it should not be forgotten that attraction of *natura* to the rational imagination forms their substrate. From the perspective of *longue durée*, only the underlying magnetic fascination with *natura* throughout the early Middle Ages can ultimately explain the otherwise rather unexpected role of prominence which it came to play in the twelfth century. Nature's imaginative vigor, therefore, rather than its various scientific ramifications will guide our unfolding investigation.²⁴

V History as Mimesis

Before continuing, it appears that we cannot avoid the question to what extent these 'theologizing' texts, which deftly combine analytic thought with the rich and largely untapped resources of the imagi-

²⁴ This is the chief difference between the approach advocated here and that found e.g. in A. Speer, *Die entdeckte Natur. Untersuchungen zu Begründungsversuchen einer 'scientia naturalis' im 12. Jahrhundert* (Leiden, 1995), 1–17. Speer's interest, to which I shall occasionally return in the course of this book, lies generally more with the question to what extent the twelfth-century's discovery of nature adumbrates thirteenth-century and later developments in both natural science and natural philosophy. My own interest lies primarily with Nature's imaginative appeal, of which the scientific interest in nature functions as a distinct aspect.

nation, help us to gain a better understanding of the period from the ninth to the twelfth century. However, this important question focusing on the contribution of these texts to the intellectual history of the early Middle Ages cannot be treated in isolation from what I see as a preliminary one, namely, the extent to which the humanist authors under review display themselves an interest in history. Dealing with the latter question first, I shall make reference to the historical work of Karl Morrison, especially to his book *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West*. Next I shall comment on the larger insight these authors give us into the intellectual history of the period.

On a rudimentary level one is indeed left to wonder whether the texts we are about to analyze care about their own place and time at all. What strikes one most on the surface is a sense of ethereal serenity rather than a concern for matters ephemeral. This suggests an escapist flight from reality rather than any curiosity or deep apprehension about it. Given the impression they make, it is not too difficult to understand why a noted medieval historian like Karl Morrison would state that Eriugena's *Periphyseon* demonstrates 'no discernible interest in history'.²⁵

Two comments must be made to nuance this perspective. The first has to do with Morrison's general project in his book on *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform*. His aim is to uncover the medieval strategy for change against the background of the period's general resistance to innovation, as this forced medieval thinkers to see the new needs of the present as somehow arising out of the past. In view of the medieval program of mimetic reform, however, it appears that Morrison—and this is where I begin to disagree—comes to regard historical and metaphysical strategies ultimately as mutually exclusive. Metaphysics is theoretical and works with noetic categories of a perennial nature, while history betrays a more practical and moral nature, whereby the human story can become embedded within the frame of salvation history. Seeing Eriugena as belonging to the

²⁵ See Karl F. Morrison, *The Mimetic Tradition of Reform in the West* (Princeton, 1982), 162–171, esp. 171 and n. 26. For a perspective on Eriugena's *Homily on the Prologue to St. John's Gospel* as discussed by Morrison that focuses more explicitly on Eriugena's sense of history, see W. Otten, 'The Parallelism of Nature and Scripture: Reflections on Eriugena's Incarnational Exegesis,' in: G. van Riel, C. Steel and J. McEvoy (eds), *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena. The Bible and Hermeneutics* (Leuven, 1996), 81–102.

former category, he assigns him an important place in the dialectical tradition of Plotinus, but all but rules him out as a thinker interested in reform. Yet in doing so Morrison overlooks precisely what is distinct about early medieval thought in the period stretching from Augustine through Anselm to Alan of Lille, as it inherited a dialectical tradition cast in a radical historical mold. This meant that intellectuals of the early Middle Ages would never reduce the alternation of procession and return to a mere cyclical process. Instead, most of the theologizing texts under review here manifest a subtle yet persistent interest in historical process, even when the discussion is conducted in a generic Christian-Platonic vein. Just like Eriugena, when he channeled creation into an eschatological apotheosis, twelfth-century authors can turn cyclical rotation skillfully into spiral gyration, as they ultimately want to bring the dialectic of procession and return to a halt.

For my second point I take my cue not from the Platonic character of many of the texts at hand, but rather from their general exegetical framework. For this we need to look again, if only for a moment, to Eriugena's *Periphyseon*. In its latter half, as is well known, this work presents itself as an extensive commentary on the beginning chapters of Genesis, with Adam's creation being eclipsed by his subsequent dramatic expulsion from paradise. Because Eriugena's exegetical musings prove largely allegorical, he displays little interest in elaborating the change in humanity's moral fate—from glory to misery—in light of a precise distinction between the period before and after sin. Given how little weight he attaches to the difference between what the reformers came to emphasize as humanity's prelapsarian *versus* its postlapsarian state, it may appear indeed as if his text is lifted beyond the level of history and into the realm of the ethereal. Considered from this angle, Morrison's comment that Eriugena lacks 'any discernible interest in history' is an understandable one. If we add to this that Eriugena defined humanity as a primordial cause, a notion eternally created in the divine mind,²⁶ the conclusion that he operated with a static worldview seems hardly avoidable. Covering the reality of the universe with an idealistic

²⁶ See *Periphyseon* IV 768B, CCCM 164: 40: *Possumus ergo hominem diffinire sic. Homo est notio quaedam intellectualis in mente diuina aeternaliter facta*. With humanity's ontological being thus grounded in the mind of the divine, it is no surprise that this definition is one of the mainstays of the thesis that Eriugena is an idealist.

overlay, he leaves room neither for historical change nor for moral development.

Yet the above analysis does an injustice to the deeper dynamic reality which the theologizing texts of Eriugena and others convey to us. To understand better this dynamism whose contours were outline above, we need to make clear how the comprehensiveness of their worldview is anchored in the intimate awareness of human sinfulness. True, most of our authors fail to indicate the precise historical turning-point between the process of *exitus* and *reditus*, but the same occurs in Origen or Gregory of Nyssa, for both of whom the beginning of history is likewise precipitated by humanity's fall. But while in the early church, as in the case of Irenaeus, sin necessitated the change of conversion through a combination of historical progress and moral improvement,²⁷ in the culture of the Christianized early medieval West the finding of a remedy for sinfulness had become a much more complex affair. Consequently, for these early medieval intellectuals the problem of human sin compromised the unfolding of history much more surreptitiously by tainting its fabric rather than derailing its course.

The absence of a clear distinction between the period before and after the fall goes far to explain why almost none of the authors under review develops an interest in *mimesis*—to use Morrison's central term—as a historical strategy for legitimating progress. They simply lack the desire to strive for moral and intellectual perfection by rejuvenating the past. Besides, this would be far too difficult a course for them, bringing them up against Christian tenets that were by now firmly established, as original sin would have to be replaced by original happiness. Since paradise as the ideal stage before sin had never existed, moreover, they did not feel the need to be nostalgic, even as they were melancholy. If we still want to consider the theme of a 'return to paradise' as programmatic for them, we have to let go entirely of the notion of paradise as the encroaching of an idealized past on a compromised present. For most of the authors under review, the return to paradise elicited an altogether different set of problems. Before all, it evoked an enormous sense of freedom with which to set out on their journey to unite God and creation. For them the interpretation of the past had become as open-ended as

²⁷ See Osborn, *Irenaeus*, 211–248.

the shaping of the future. By excluding the reality of its historical past, therefore, not only did they endow the image of paradise with a future, they also gave their own awareness of human history a new, more imaginative, lease on life. Through a reinterpretation of human history it appeared to them that the comprehensiveness of nature could translate far more effectively into the comprehensiveness of human self-understanding.

What then are we to conclude from this about their actual view of history? While Morrison has written elsewhere about twelfth-century historical writing as a visual art,²⁸ indicating how historical writers in the twelfth century had a wide variety of rhetorical means at their disposal, it is important to note here that a concern for human history is not just confined to writings within the historical genre. In the twelfth century, a concern for history underlies a good many rhetorical texts, including the most imaginative poetry. A good example can be found in Abelard's *Planctus*, where his longing to identify with biblical heroes guides him in establishing new standards of ethical reflection, while at the same time improving his self-understanding.²⁹ Why it is that in the twelfth century historical interests of a certain kind, especially as related to self-understanding, found a more powerful expression in poetry than in other rhetorical genres is only one of the issues to be explored below. It may just allow us to add one more shade to the rich spectrum defining the relationship of form and content in this sphere of medieval writing.

For now it suffices to say that, while these early medieval intellectuals may have rejected the view that human sin introduced concrete moral-temporal decline, this does not warrant the conclusion of a supposed historical indifference on their part.³⁰ The opposite

²⁸ See K.F. Morrison, *History as a Visual Art in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (Princeton, 1990). Some of the concepts used by Morrison, such as that of 'symbolic synesthesia', the notion of play as a cognitive strategy, are useful in the context of this study as well. See esp. his chapter 8, Conclusions: a Word on 'Medieval Humanism', 245–51.

²⁹ Dinah's lament, based on the story in Gen. 34 of her rape by Sichem, is the first of Abelard's six *planctus*. I will return to this lament below in chapter 5 on Abelard's ethics, pp. 208–11.

³⁰ My view also runs counter to the widespread view that indifference to history is the ineluctable result of all cosmological interest. See W. Wetherbee, 'Philosophy, cosmology and the twelfth-century Renaissance,' in: Dronke (ed.), *Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, 21–53, esp. 42: 'In relation to the twelfth-century's well-known

may well be more likely. Having sacrificed the sharp dividing-line between a sinless past and a sinful present, these intellectuals committed themselves with great enthusiasm to a careful rearrangement of the various tasks, including moral ones, that go into the administration of a semi-divine universe. For one, if the gnawing impact of human sin on history were to be taken seriously, God's position as creator and humanity's role as *natura's* ambassador created in God's image had to be recalibrated, if not reassessed completely. Their most delicate task was no doubt to bring out how the totality of the universe could manifest perfection and corruption, bliss and misery, not in sequence but simultaneously. Since such a stunning reassessment had to be one of perspectival nuance rather than dramatic conversion, be it historical or moral, it required considerable sophistication not to replace exegetical literalism with poetic or allegorical license, but to keep a balance between them through a responsible 'ethics of interpretation'.³¹ With the interpretation of paradise as a bygone historical era effectively ruled out, the motive to call for change through *mimesis* all but disappeared, as a new approach took its place. This literary approach, starting with Eriugena and culminating in the twelfth century, was to leave room for the presence of a past as a constant opportunity for reinterpretation.³² This I see as the chief historical incentive inspiring and shaping the humanist outlook of the authors under review.

concern with history the work of the cosmologists, as well as the widespread concern with other more spiritually oriented Platonisms, poses a complex problem, for the effect of a Platonist cosmology in which human life imitates the cyclical life of nature, or is part of an all-embracing continuum of emanation and return, is to 'detemporalize and deexistentialize' the order of things, and to promote a view in which human progress and decline can seem relatively independent of the pivotal events of sacred history'.

³¹ For an explanation of this, see below chapter 5.V (Grace and the Self) on Abelard's ethics as a counter-morality and 6.V (The Art of Ambiguity) on Abelard's and Bernard Silvestris' discretionary use of poetry.

³² This implies a rehabilitation of the didactic value of the rhetorical and historical *exemplum*. For an extensive treatment of this, see Peter von Moos, *Geschichte als Topik. Das rhetorische Exemplum von der Antike zur Neuzeit und die historiae im 'Policraticus' Johanns von Salisbury* (Hildesheim/New York, 1988), 22–143. See also below chapter 6.IV (When Practice Meets Theory) on Bernard Silvestris' *Mathematicus*.

VI *The Chartrian Controversy*

We now come to the second point that was raised regarding the historical quality of our project: what, if anything, can these texts tell us about the intellectual history of the period? More specifically, where are they to be situated in the intellectual landscape of the twelfth century? Given the above comments, especially those about the perspectival quality of many of the texts under review, one could seriously doubt whether they give us any historical insight at all. After all, the twelfth century is widely heralded as an age of reform, if not a renaissance, by most contemporary historians,³³ and the rhetoric of poetry generally seems an ill-suited medium to implement a reform program. Besides, the twelfth century was also an age of classical revival, in which naturalistic explanations of the cosmos were neither unusual nor seen as principally at odds with a more exegetical approach. Various observations can help us settle the historical question, as I shall briefly dwell on each of them. It is my intent to treat them as different facets from which to build a more complex profile of this historical period than is often found.

One of the more obvious problems to which the perspectival approach of *natura*'s comprehensiveness found in our authors alerts us is a looming erosion or fragmentation of language. It is clear that in the twelfth century language is no longer univocal. Only rarely—and not really in any of the authors we will discuss—do we find the kind of single voice that could hold together the meandering discourse of a John the Scot, as he was able to sustain a univocal discourse even when linking disconnected philosophical and exegetical claims. The underlying threat that language might cease to make sense underscores why poets like Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille are so difficult to interpret, as their texts are laden with ambiguity. Be that as it may, a more central question is what caused this fragmentation of language or erosion of meaning in the twelfth century.

Reflecting the various scholarly developments of the last decades, one possible answer is to relate this process to the birth of new audi-

³³ The main studies to be cited here from the vast literature on this topic are: C.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927); R.L. Benson and G. Constable (eds), *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (1982; Toronto, 1991); Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*; G. Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1996).

ences in the late eleventh and twelfth century. With the growing need for professional specialization resulting in a widening gap between scholastic and monastic audiences, it seemed a variety of discourses began to develop. Since their effective use required increased sophistication, the new language patterns caused the different groups who brought them into play to become gradually less accessible to people on the outside. In his important study *The Implications of Literacy* Brian Stock introduced the term 'textual communities' to explain how the rapid growth of literacy affected traditional forms of social organization to the point of undermining them.³⁴ While Stock had coined the term initially to explain the rise of various heretical and reform groups, as the growth of literacy empowered them to put forth diverging views,³⁵ upon a broader definition it seemed useful to extend its scope to cover the growing divide between monastic and scholastic schools. Recently, thinking along similar lines, Stephen Jaeger devoted a study to the new intellectual prominence of the cathedral schools in the early twelfth century. He points out how cathedral schools came to promote ideals that were geared particularly to the new urban classes and their need for administrative experience and expertise. As a result, their traditional alliance with monastic schools gradually diminished and a process of educational diversification appears to have set in.³⁶

Taking serious account of these and other findings, such as those on the classical revival, one may be tempted to see the authors studied here as constituting their own community of sorts, distancing themselves from other intellectual groups and employing an ever more technical language of their own. This scenario becomes even more plausible if we factor in that most of them—with the clear exception of Peter Abelard—have traditionally been associated with the famous cathedral School of Chartres.³⁷ Upon applying this hypothesis

³⁴ For a definition of textual community, see Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy. Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, 1983), 88–92.

³⁵ See Stock, *Implications of Literacy*, 151–240 on the Pataria. In the same vein, see also H. Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholars in the High Middle Ages*, trans. D.A. Kaiser (1992; University Park, 1998), 13–152.

³⁶ See C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels. Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia, 1994), pp. 325–29. For a useful assessment of the culture of medieval learning focused on the monastic sphere, see Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (1961; New York, 1988).

³⁷ Thierry of Chartres and William of Conches actually taught there. Bernard

to the actual nature of their particular writings, however, serious problems come to the fore. Their nature is twofold. First of all, underlying this attempt at historical reconstruction is the untested idea that this erosion of traditional patterns of language and meaning was somehow brought about by the modern, semi-professional drive towards clarity, with clarity fast becoming the operative term in assessing the development of twelfth-century intellectual life. Presenting us with a more concrete problem, the second point touches on the mystery surrounding the movement of the so-called school of Chartres as an actual local school and a related school of thought.

To analyze the first problem we take our cue from the recent study *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe* by the late sir Richard Southern. Against the background of successful cathedral schools and incipient universities, this eminent scholar has tried to analyze how the increased move towards professional specialization yielded an ever more refined technical language in such different fields as theology, philosophy and law, both secular and canon law.³⁸ In Southern's view, this move towards clarification on all educational fronts is much to be praised, as it underlies what he calls the birth of 'scholastic humanism'. The picture thus painted of the twelfth-century intellectual landscape is one in which the push for social stratification reflected in the rise of new religious, commercial and educational communities is accompanied by a growing diversification and professionalization of language. What we have descriptively, though perhaps somewhat pejoratively, characterized as the fragmentation of language signals to Southern an irresistible positive development, as education becomes geared towards pedagogical and disciplinary efficiency. Opening up the possibility of catering to different audiences and generally foreshadowing a greater professionalism, this technical specialization and refinement of language inaugurates an era of ever greater clarity.³⁹

Silvestris was in neighboring Tours but reveals his ties by dedicating his poem to Thierry of Chartres, while Alan of Lille seems to have undergone the influence of Chartrian cosmological speculation. For a succinct survey of the main teachers associated with Chartres, see E. Jeuneau, *L'âge d'or des écoles de Chartres* (Chartres, 1995).

³⁸ See Southern, *Scholastic Humanism*, Vol. I, Foundations: chs. 3 (on the Bible as the textbook in the schools), 5 (on important masters) and 9 (on Gratian and canon law).

³⁹ See Southern, *Scholastic Humanism*, Vol. I, 1–13. On p. 3 Southern states: 'The system of thought which the masters, and especially those of Bologna and Paris,

Southern's view of clarity as the hallmark of scholastic humanism is in stark contrast with the existence of a group of loosely connected authors, such as those studied here, since their strength lies in their sustained exploration of ambiguity. This may help to explain why Southern felt it necessary over the years to launch a number of sharply critical attacks on the supposed existence of a so-called School of Chartres.⁴⁰ While these attacks have yielded a number of solid historical findings, as Southern was able to demolish the notion of an actual school located at Chartres cathedral with an educational following comparable to the schools in Paris, he did so at the cost of downplaying, if not denying altogether, the collective contribution of the different individual authors in this group. Attributing little originality to these Chartrian ideas, he went so far as to rule out any affinity between their various texts.⁴¹

were the first to elaborate was a corporate and European-wide achievement bringing a large-scale unity of life and ideals . . . The ground of this hope (that still existing gaps in this system would be filled by the masters) was that the whole system, in its assumptions, its sources, its methods and aims, expressed a coherent view of Creation, of the Fall and Redemption of mankind, and of the sacraments whereby the redeeming process could be extended to individuals'.

⁴⁰ Important full-scale studies of the School of Chartres are J.M. Parent, O.P., *La doctrine de la création dans l'école de Chartres* (Paris/Ottawa, 1938); W. Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century. The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres* (Princeton, 1972); E. Jeaneau, *Lectio philosophorum. Recherches sur l'école de Chartres* (Amsterdam, 1973). After Southern published the essay 'Humanism and the School of Chartres' (*Medieval Humanism and Other Studies*, pp. 61–85) in which he claimed that a proper School of Chartres never existed, various voices came to its defense, which led to Southern's modification of his original position. See Peter Dronke, 'New Approaches to the School of Chartres,' *Anuario de estudios medievales* 6 (1969): 117–40 and Richard W. Southern, *Platonism, scholastic method, and the School of Chartres*. The Stenton Lecture (University of Reading, 1978) and R.W. Southern, 'The Schools of Paris and the School of Chartres', in: Constable and Benson, *Renaissance and Renewal*, 113–37. Southern's chapter 'Chartrian Humanism: a Romantic Misconception,' in *Scholastic Humanism*, Vol. I, 58–101 is an extensive revision of the article in *Renaissance and Renewal* which both continues and comments on this earlier discussion.

⁴¹ See Southern, 'Chartrian Humanism: a Romantic Misconception'. Interesting here is that Southern does not just reject the idea of an actual school at Chartres, but criticizes also those who advocated a de-localized view of Chartrian thought, such as Jeaneau, Wetherbee and Dronke. Agreeing with many of Southern's criticisms, I think two mistakes are being made in his approach. The first is that over the years the discussion has focused too much on the problem of *exclusion*: who did not belong to the Chartrians. This approach may need to be complemented by the question of *inclusion*: who did belong? It seems to me, for example, that a Chartrian master like Gilbert of Poitiers is in many ways closer to the development of scholasticism than to Chartrian thought. Second, as is evident from his chapter, Southern passes over the affinity of thought linking the authors treated here too lightly, as

While Southern's preference for scholastic clarification forced him not just to reject the existence of an actual 'school of thought' at Chartres, but to dismiss that the authors conventionally grouped as such made any joint contribution, let alone a humanist one,⁴² there may be a different way of laying the idea of a Chartrian controversy to rest. To this end we need to entertain the possibility that the perceived fragmentation of language, rather than being a side effect of the newly emerging professional communities in the early twelfth century, constitutes one of its contributing causes. More familiar features of twelfth-century intellectual life support such a view. First, we have a situation of overlapping audiences. Some authors, so it seems, were able to move quite comfortably within different social milieus, drifting from one group to the next. This makes all but plausible the idea of language contamination, as it is evident that the new professional groups were not completely shielded from outside influences. If we factor in that the twelfth century witnessed intense urban mobility, we arrive at the distinct possibility that allegiances could be transferred and careers switched. Abelard, for example, was a scholastic author who became a monk, as did William of St. Thierry, whereas William of Conches, having grown frustrated with his teaching experience in the schools, decided to exchange the ecclesiastical setting of Chartres for the aristocratic court of the Duke of Normandy.⁴³ While these and other examples testify to the social and intellectual mobility of the age, it should not be forgotten that the traffic of leading minds was considerably aided by the fact that underneath the push for clarity twelfth-century language retained a degree of fluidity. What is more, it appears that the emergence of multiple audiences reinforced the attraction of pluriform meaning, as there was an increased chance that different shades of meaning would actually be picked up. This explains the fascination with the concept of *integumentum* (wrapping) in the interpretation of pagan poetry, to which we will return in different chapters below.

the hallmark of clarity that marks scholastic humanism to him comes to serve more and more as a kind of Procrustean measuring-rod.

⁴² Southern never discusses the internal disagreement of his earlier definition of medieval humanism (cf. his volume of essays on *Medieval Humanism*) with his later, more stringently rational, definition of scholastic humanism. While the first definition allows him to accommodate monastic and poetic thought, the second does not.

⁴³ For a good interpretation of William's career as reflecting his intellectual position, see Joan Cadden, 'Science and Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: The Natural Philosophy of William of Conches,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 1–24.

As an aside it may be important to point out that the possibility of pluriform meaning was by no means limited to the authors traditionally associated with the actual school of Chartres. Despite his great command of technical vocabulary, a certain degree of ambiguity is also manifest in the logic of Peter Abelard, as we will come to illustrate in chapters 4 and 5. More surprisingly, ambiguity may even be detected behind the monastic resolve and rhetorical virtuosity of Bernard of Clairvaux, as was demonstrated by M.B. Pranger, although the monastic tradition falls outside the scope of this book.⁴⁴ Such examples serve as an indication that by the mid-twelfth century the divergence of monastic and scholastic milieus was not yet complete. Neither did the push for clarity mean that from now on intellectual positions had to be couched in absolute terms. Although they were far apart on doctrinal matters, Bernard and Abelard could still phrase their respective positions with a comparable flexibility of expression. What binds the authors treated here in the end, if not as a social group tied to the cathedral school of Chartres then surely as an intellectual movement of some significance, is the fact that they deliberately seized on this fluidity. As one of the most distinct features of their theologizing texts, we can watch them apply their perspectival approach with a certain degree of self-consciousness. In line with the sophistication of their age, they did not shy away from embracing ambiguity of meaning as a literary asset rather than a hindrance. To the extent that they did so, ambiguity must indeed be called an important characteristic of their intellectual program.

What then is the historical importance of the authors treated here? Even if we grant Southern's point that it is ill advised to want to connect all of them to the actual school at Chartres cathedral, there is enough coherence and affinity of thought linking them to treat them as a group. For now, the following few observations may suffice to assess their intellectual contribution. First, by preferring self-consciousness and ambiguity to rational clarity, the authors under review make clear that the twelfth-century renaissance is not just about

⁴⁴ See Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought*, 163–206 on Bernard's sermon 26 on the Song of Songs dealing with the death of his brother Gerard. See also his article 'Sic et non: Patristic Authority between Refusal and Acceptance: Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux,' in: I. Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West. From the Carolingians to the Maurists*. Two Volumes (Leiden, 1997), Vol. I: 165–93.

uncovering new and unexplored possibilities but also implies a rekindled interest in existing ones.⁴⁵ This may help to explain certain oddities in the philosophical picture presented by the twelfth century, as a clear revival of Platonism went side by side with the introduction of Aristotle's *logica nova*. Apart from the general observation that Aristotelianism was often mediated through Platonizing and Stoicizing authorities,⁴⁶ a preference for ambiguity may help further to explain why the interest in Plato and the analysis of the new Aristotle could seamlessly go together. Second, by advocating pluriformity of meaning the authors in this group do more than just testifying to the possibilities of their age, as they offer us an approach which contains implicit criticism. For notwithstanding the benefits brought about in the process of scholastic clarification, as an intellectual method scholasticism was to exclude certain options that had enjoyed a quiet existence before, even if they were not always actualized. One may think here of the linguistic analyses of the Trinity that got Abelard into trouble or the physiological studies by William of Conches. Both of them were attacked by William of St. Thierry who could only condemn them as heterodox, for aiming at transgression.⁴⁷ Using the experimental freedom of their age, however, their way of shedding light on the doctrinal tenets of twelfth-century orthodoxy was not to promote clarity but to tap into the latent resources of a fading society. What some of these resources were and to what alternative intellectual models their exploration could have led constitutes the subplot connecting the various chapters of this study.

⁴⁵ See e.g. Abelard's rekindled interest in Benedictine monasticism, even though he would never quite feel at ease in a monastic environment. On Abelard's view of himself as a monk, see my article 'The Bible and the Self in Medieval Autobiography: Otloh of St. Emmeram (1010–1070) and Peter Abelard (1079–1142),' in: D.E. Aune and J. McCarthy (eds), *The Whole and Divided Self. The Bible and Theological Anthropology* (New York, 1997), 130–57.

⁴⁶ See Stock, *Myth and Science*, 23–31 on how Bernard Silvestris a.o. received their Aristotelianism chiefly from traditional *physici* and *medici*. On the particular case of Hermann of Carinthia whose *De essentiis* (1143 CE) mixes Platonic and Aristotelian thought, see Charles Burnett, 'Hermann of Carinthia,' in: Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, 386–404, esp. 396.

⁴⁷ See below the chapters on William of Conches (ch. 3) and Abelard (chs. 4 and 5).

VII *The End of Twelfth-Century Humanism*

To conclude this introductory chapter, it is apposite to spell out more precisely what intellectual program, if any, the authors under review appear to have favored. This leads me to address once more why I chose to call this study a book on twelfth-century humanism. Given the thrust of my arguments so far, I clearly see this group of authors, most of whom are broadly Chartrian in inspiration, as part of the twelfth-century renaissance. Although they were generally interested in intellectual advancement and as such eager to define their position in relation to a historical past, this past did not represent sinless perfection for them. Hence their strategy was never one of *mimesis*. In contrast, they appear to have opted for a strategy of *poiesis*, i.e., of poetic or perspectival interpretation. Since the ideal of paradise had, in their minds, never existed, their yearning for a return there signaled what was in fact a creative launching forward to an open-ended future. In terms of method, this means that their texts could proceed through different literary strategies, which I have collectively called the rhetoric of remembrance, as opposed to the recording of history.⁴⁸

But how were they able to sustain this project and, what may be even more intriguing, why did their creative and dynamic approach to reality in the end fail to succeed? At this point a few comments about the relative strengths and weaknesses of their humanist outlook must serve as a provisional answer, as the individual chapters will elaborate on this more in depth. The role of humanity is clearly central to their project of mapping out in dynamic fashion the full complexity of reality. On the one hand human beings are the keen observers and reporters of the beauty of an all-embracing, semi-divine natural universe, yet at the same time they also pose the

⁴⁸ My idea of *poiesis* here has some affinity with what Barbara Newman calls by the term 'imaginative theology', especially insofar as she sees it characterized 'by certain rhetorical devices that double as exploratory techniques, enabling both writer and reader to visualize, conceptualize, and interact with emissaries of the Divine'. See B. Newman, *God and the Goddesses. Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2003), 299. Rather than adding another label, thereby falling into a kind of scholastic trap, the present study purposely wants to avoid such compartmentalization. Instead I have opted to describe a certain ambience, which allows us to understand better the peculiar dynamic quality of early medieval theologizing texts without formally categorizing them.

gravest danger to its integrity. In a comprehensive world view the implications of human sin are so disruptive that they threaten to bring the dynamics of reality to an abrupt standstill. It is the very wish to preserve the integral dynamics of universal nature, despite the impact of sin, that lies at the heart of what I call the twelfth-century's humanist program. Oscillating between the alternatives of overcoming the effects of human sin through remedial action, as advised by the church's penitential policy, or of ignoring their reality altogether, as in the case of outright heresy, the authors involved in this humanist project choose to walk a fine line by aiming at what one might call 'restoration through interpretation'.

The chief and most creative tool at their disposal in all this was the concept of *integumentum* or wrapping. In the next chapter I shall comment more deeply on the use of *integumentum* as an interpretive device. Here it is important to mention that this 'integumental' strategy allowed the Chartrians to separate (outward) form from (inward) content in such a way that it became the exclusive prerogative of human interpretation to establish a connection between them. Their approach, however difficult, had numerous advantages. It allowed them freely to accept mythical and pagan fables, for example, as long as they were part of a program directed ultimately to Christian illumination.⁴⁹ To the extent that such fables and myths referred back to the truth, which naturally was a Christian one, neither the threat of heresy nor the danger of error loomed large. At least, not until the interpreter himself became suspect, as happened to Peter Abelard and William of Conches. What is particularly intriguing about the use of *integumentum* is that it made for an integral, non-hierarchical reading of the relation between reality and representation. Hence, it was not only possible to give multiple interpretations of one *integumentum*, but also to attach a single interpretation to a variety of *integumenta*. Rather than molding an amorphous reality into pre-established categories, it is the task of the human interpreter to confer pluriform meaning on a pluriform reality.

⁴⁹ The seminal study on *integumentum* in the twelfth century is: E. Jeuneau, 'L'usage de la notion d'*integumentum* à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 32 (1957): 35–87, repr. in: E. Jeuneau, *Lectio philosophorum*, 127–192. See also Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, 36–48 and especially the insightful discussion of *integumentum* and related metaphorical terms (*involutum*, *translatio*, *imago*, *similitudo*) in William of Conches and Abelard in Dronke, *Fabula*, 13–67.

To bring out the strength of the 'integumental' approach even more, I shall briefly comment on the ingredients that go into this interpretive strategy. Some of these have been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter as well. There we stated how Peter Dronke pointed to the combination of reason and imagination as peculiar to this segment of twelfth-century intellectual discourse. Here we might expand on this by saying that, apart from reason and imagination, the authors under review also combine logic and poetry, Nature and Scripture, philosophy and theology, and even rhetoric and physics. Their openness not just to a plurality of approaches but to their polyvalent simultaneity, while going counter to the clarifying trend of the age as interpreted by Southern, is extremely instructive, inasmuch it reveals how a dynamic representation of reality must ultimately be multi-layered. For this reason alone it would be worth writing a book like this, as it can help to broaden the traditional interpretation of the twelfth-century renaissance beyond the stock phrases of clarification and linear progress.⁵⁰ Obviously, it is easier to tally the various contributions of individual new disciplines than it is to make out the subtle shades of meaning hiding beneath the opulence of one and the same 'integumental' approach. In the same way, clarity is a much more rewarding subject than ambiguity. But we should seriously ask ourselves if we do not misjudge the twelfth-century renaissance, if we fail to include this particular aspect of it as well. In fact, one can make a strong case that capturing the efflorescence of this humanist program pays an equally meaningful tribute as describing the rise of scholasticism, since the fact that the one had an afterlife and the other came to an end is true only in hindsight.

As I hinted at before, while it was the particular strength of the so-called Chartrian approach to bring out the interdependence between universal reality and interpretive practice by seeing them both as multi-layered, this very strength proved also the beginning of its demise. The attempt to juggle the advances of the various disciplines

⁵⁰ On this point M.-D. Chenu's study of twelfth-century theology, while dated in some respects, is still of valuable importance. See M.-D. Chenu O.P., *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century. Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, trans. J. Taylor and L.K. Little (1957; Chicago, 1968). I will analyze Chenu's book and the merits of its central thesis below in chapter 7.IV (Early Medieval Standstill *versus* Late Medieval Development).

by way of an 'integumental' interpretation into a single frame of reference was ultimately bound to fail. The collapse of this 'integumental' view of reality signals the end of the humanist outlook as embodied by the authors represented here. Henceforth medieval interpreters, at least the ones writing in Latin as the vernacular languages show a rather different development, were no longer able to shape reality as much as they themselves would be shaped by it, i.e., by the limitations of their tools. Not until the renaissance do we find a similar juncture of interests solidified in a humanist program.

How this 'integumental' mindset slowly unraveled will be the subject of the following chapters, as its blossoming can hardly be treated in isolation of its demise. Throughout the course of this book it will become more and more clear how the return to paradise faded from vital remembrance to rhetorical illusion. Losing the weight of human memory appeared to have a disintegrating effect, as paradise was transformed from a polyvalent *integumentum* into a stock-still paradigm, its rhetorical appeal no longer evoking a corresponding reality. It appears that with the demise of this 'integumental' approach the ideals of Chartrian humanism came to an end. Hence the title of my book.

Let me end with a passage foreboding this ominous change from paradise to paradigm. It may even embody it. For this we have to turn to the last decade of the twelfth century, when Alan of Lille published his *Anticlaudianus*, the masterful sequel to his earlier *Plaint of Nature*. Deploring the defilement of Nature by humanity, Alan's new poem describes the glorious birth of a New Man. He is created by Nature, while God endows him with a soul. The birth of this New Man aptly marks the dawn of a golden age on earth. Given the way in which the poem's epic plot unfolds, it is tempting to see Alan's New Man as a human alternative to the Incarnate Christ. This view has been well argued by G.R. Evans who, in order to make her case, could draw on the widespread theological criticism of Anselm in the twelfth century. Whereas Anselm's incarnational theory hinges on the rational necessity of a God-Man, as the only way to restore the integrity of creation is by divine intervention, in contrast Alan's New Man is a product of the liberal arts. For in creating the New Man, Nature was helped by her seven well-educated sisters. It thus seems all but evident that Alan intends his New Man to represent the creative heights to which a modern twelfth-century education, marking humanity's true re-birth, was able to

aspire.⁵¹ Yet we should sincerely ask ourselves whether seeing the New Man as an alternate Christ here does not lead Evans to err on the side of clarification. Does she not take the 'theologizing' nature of Alan's poem one step too far? By readily identifying the New Man with an alternate Christ, it appears her scholastic reading reduces Alan's 'integumental' image to the mechanical existence of a divine icon. She thereby conveniently overlooks that humanity's ongoing attacks and its continued failure at self-improvement had forced Nature, not God, to look for a substitute in the first place.

Apart from doing injustice to the 'theologizing' nature of Alan's texts, I have tried to argue elsewhere that this scholastic reading of the New Man underestimates Alan's very poetical talent.⁵² Still, there is a way in which Evans is right and in which Alan does indeed appear unable to flesh out the New Man's existence beyond that of an icon. For that we need to take a close look at how Alan describes his birth. When Phronesis has finally reached the heavens on her mission to find a soul for the New Man, God orders his deputy Noys to look for one. Alan then describes the following scene:

Then on the King's instructions, Noys scrutinises exemplars of each and every thing and searches for a new archetype. Among so many species she has difficulty in finding the one she seeks; finally the object of her search presents itself to the seeker. In its mirror everything of grace finds a home—the beauty of Joseph, the wisdom of Judith, the patience of just Job, the zeal of Phineas, the modesty of Moses, the simplicity of Jacob, the faith of Abraham, the piety of Tobias. Noys presents this form to God to use as exemplar in forming the soul. He then took a seal and gives the soul a form along the lines of its form; He impresses on the pattern the appearance called for by the archetype. The image takes on all the power of the exemplar and the figure identifies the seal.⁵³

Alongside a finely shaped body, the New Man has now received a perfect soul, graced archetypally with all the well-known biblical virtues. But without a memory, it appears he lacks the complexity

⁵¹ G.R. Evans, *Alan of Lille. The Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1983), 133–65 (Making Man Anew).

⁵² See W. Otten, 'Between Damnation and Restoration. The Dynamics of Human Nature in Eriugena's *Periphyseon* and Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*,' in: H.J. Westra (ed.), *From Athens to Chartres. Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeuneau* (Leiden, 1992), 329–349, esp. 346.

⁵³ See *Alain de Lille, Anticlaudianus* VI.434–47, ed. Bossuat, 153–54; trans. J.J. Sheridan, *Alan of Lille. Anticlaudianus or the Good and Perfect Man*, 170–71.

of Adam, in whose archetypal being the contingencies of human history could all be found encapsulated.⁵⁴ It is as if Alan's drastic measure of overcoming the effect, however compromising, of human sin through the glorious overlay of a New Man signifies how underneath its poetic surface the Chartrian concept of the universe has ultimately come to lack appeal. Bernard Silvestris may have wearily conceded that, had the first human stayed in paradise, it was merely as a guest, yet the lingering echo of an Adamic stay gives his poetry a powerful impulse, leading him to interweave microcosm and macrocosm into a dynamic view of the natural universe. When we compare the unadorned allusion to Adam's brief sojourn as inspiring Bernard's own poetic journey, to Alan's New Man, the latter appears successful only to the extent that one immediately recognizes him to be a rhetorical illusion. Alan's New Man is the perfection of 'integumental' form without content, i.e., without a corresponding reality and a proper sense of history. This omission makes the New Man not only a figment of Alan's imagination, but to the extent that he is created as a man without a memory, it appears he can live only as a man without qualities.⁵⁵ Endowed with divine splendor but without any qualities of his own, he can only ward off an attack by the vices with the explicit help of the virtues, as in Alan's poetry a peaceful reign is finally established on earth. Rather than an alternate Christ, therefore, it appears the New Man represents a substitute Adam, or what is perhaps worse, an Adamic clone. Left to Alan's skilled hand, this New Man may well be able to establish a golden reign on earth, but without any integral ties to a past that is open to human soul-searching his paradisaical reign has a future only in poetry.

⁵⁴ Recently, Barbara Newman has introduced the idea of the New Man as a romance hero, but in doing so she seems to leave aside the problem of Alan's wooden elaboration of his hero. See B. Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 83.

⁵⁵ By this expression I refer to the English translation ('Man without Qualities') of the famous Austrian novel by R. Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften. II Bände* (Hamburg, 1978). This is not because I detect any factual likeness between Alan's New Man and Musil's hero Ulrich. But there is an analogy in the way in which both Alan's poem and Musil's novel provide us with a valuable intellectual comment on their respective eras. Whereas in Musil's novel Ulrich's lack of qualities makes him an ideal anti-hero whose misfortunes foreshadow the impending collapse of European culture prior to World War I, Alan's description of the New Man in the *Anticlaudianus* makes him an ideal counter-Adam. Thus the New Man reveals to his contemporaries the phasing out of the older, more literary but also more ambiguous approach to theology after the rise of twelfth-century scholasticism. See also chapter 7.VI and 7.VII below.

CHAPTER TWO

NATURE AND SCRIPTURE: TALE OF A MEDIEVAL ANALOGY AND ITS DEMISE

Preamble

In this chapter our focus will be on the parallelism of Nature and Scripture, which I see as one of the mainstays of early medieval intellectual culture. As such this analogy also played an important role in providing at least a modicum of coherence to the ‘theologizing’ texts this book sets out to study. We will study these texts more in depth in the following chapters, which will be devoted to individual authors. In this chapter my overarching argument is that the culture of the early medieval west, having grown out of patristic culture but adapted to changed circumstances, rested squarely on this analogy of Nature and Scripture in an unspoken, albeit not an inarticulate way. Even though none of the authors we are dealing with ever really theorized about this analogy, it is extremely important to notice its presence as underlying their texts. For one thing, it may help to explain why they were so keenly interested in keeping the expanding horizon of nature somehow anchored in a deepened sense of self-awareness, inasmuch as it appears that the expanding scope of nature was productively countered by the imploding effect of human sin. Rather than blaming early medieval authors for their lack of interest in developing a precise vocabulary by which to distinguish scientific from literary terms—a fact that can readily be conceded as we witness their growing interest in nature’s adornment—I want to study how for many centuries this analogy of *longue durée* functioned as an effective bridge whereby the memory of paradise was closely linked to the possibility of its restoration. By giving authors and readers of early medieval texts the sense that the textual metaphors used in them had some claim on divine truth, whose power while transcending the level of texts, was yet available to them, the parallel of Nature and Scripture came to serve as an important beacon for the rational imagination, pointing the way to a paradisaical future.

In my view, the crumbling of this analogy is an important reason why the culture of early medieval theologizing which reached far into the twelfth century and climaxed in the humanist outlook associated with, but not confined to, the school of Chartres, came to an end. Only at the end of the twelfth century, with the birth of Alan of Lille's New Man, do we truly feel the pressure of scholastic clarity, which Richard Southern described so elegantly, even if he dated it prematurely.¹ With the individual options marking the former perspectival approach gradually eliminated, there was but a single dilemma left for twelfth-century intellectuals. One could either go down the road of clarity towards scholastic humanism or one risked plunging one's views in the shadows of obscurity, in which region more often than not monastic thinkers fled to find refuge. Besides telling the tale of this analogy, therefore, this chapter will also try to give us an insight into its final demise, not from a sociological angle but from inside the fragmentation of language itself. It may be a very sign of this literary fragmentation that the actual use of the metaphor of the two books, that of Nature and that of Scripture, only started to blossom with Bonaventure in the thirteenth century and beyond.²

In contrast with the previous chapter, we will here begin by concentrating on the role of Scripture, as the early Middle Ages inherited a biblical tradition that had been well shaped to be open to cosmological interpretation.

¹ For a succinct definition of scholastic clarity, see R.W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, Volume I: Foundations (Oxford, 1995), 4–5. See also the above criticism of Southern in ch. 1.VI (The Chartrian Controversy). Here it is important to mention that there seems to be one other possibility open to twelfth-century intellectuals that Southern does not touch upon, that is, to compose in the vernacular rather than in Latin. The afterlife of twelfth-century humanism in vernacular medieval literature is an important theme to which I will briefly return in chapters 6 and 7 below.

² The analogy of the world as a book is already found in Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus* 4, PL 176: 814B: *Universus enim mundus iste sensibilis quasi quidam liber est scriptus digito Dei, hoc est virtute divina creatus . . .* ('For the whole sensible world is like a kind of book written by the finger of God, that is, created by divine power . . .'), but see n. 71 below for the separation of *opus conditionis* and *opus restorationis* in Hugh. See also Bonaventure, *Breviloquium* II c.12.1 (Paris, 1966–67), 122: *creatura mundi est quasi quidam liber, in quo relucet, repraesentatur et legitur Trinitas fabricatrix* ('The world's creation is like a book, in which the creative Trinity shines, is represented and read'). In II c.5.1.2, pp. 76–78, Bonaventure, like Hugh, distinguishes between the book of creation and of Scripture by seeing them as reflective of God as *principium effectivum* and as *principium reparativum* respectively. The analogy may have

I *The Medieval Synthesis of Nature and Scripture*

A. *The Referentiality of Scripture*³

Throughout the history of Christian thought the theological role of Scripture as source of transcendent meaning has exercised considerable influence on the art and manner of biblical interpretation. In the early church the problems circled mostly around the canon, specifically though not exclusively of the New Testament, as defining the confines of scripture. Thus the question arose which biblical writings could be seen as divinely inspired, and which were of doubtful origin, and hence unacceptable for the Christian communities that had broken away from their ancestral Judaic religion. Even before the canon was fixed, however, the problems shifted from the divinely inspired composition of the Bible to its intrinsic signification, as scriptural language was itself seen as infused with theological content.⁴ With exegetical positions leading to the development of credal statements which solidified into theological dogma, the early church witnessed a growing link between biblical interpretation and sound doctrine.⁵ By enforcing sanctioned interpretations through effective

reached a high point in the natural theology of the fifteenth-century Spanish philosopher Raymond de Sebond, *Theologia naturalis sive liber creaturarum*, which inspired Montaigne to his famous apology of Sebond, who was condemned at the Council of Trent. For a useful overview of the comparison between Scripture and nature from patristic times until the reformation, see Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge, 1998), 34–120. See also n. 27 below.

³ Throughout this chapter I use the term Scripture primarily to reflect the stock early Christian and medieval view of the Bible as the sacred book of Christianity which not only contains the Divine Word but is ultimately authored by it. In the course of what follows, however, I hope to show that this view of scripture as source of transcendent meaning does not thereby exclude that of 'scripture as a human activity' as formulated by W.C. Smith. For this and other helpful reflections on the notion of Scripture, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis, 1993), 18.

⁴ See Sandra Schneiders, 'Scripture and Spirituality,' in: Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (eds), *Christian Spirituality. Origins to the Twelfth Century* (New York, 1988), 1–20. On p. 6 Schneiders lists this underlying assumption of early Christian exegesis: 'It was believed not only that every word was inspired by God but also that every word was the bearer, in some way, of divine revelation'. One may interpret the first part of Schneiders' statement as alluding to the early Christian debates on the canon (cf. the Marcionite heresy), and the second as alluding more specifically to the art of biblical interpretation and its recourse to such exegetical devices as allegory and typology to bring out the connection between the Old and the New Testament.

⁵ An example of this development is the treatise *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*

excommunication, an ever more powerful church sealed the dominance of orthodoxy over heresy with the near-divine force of ecclesiastical authority. Once we enter the church-dominated culture of the Middle Ages, the adequacy of scriptural interpretation—its method, its content, the credentials of its practitioners—is often measured by its conformity with an expanding theological tradition.

Although the marriage between biblical interpretation and theological tradition would today be suitably dismissed as medieval, we should be careful not to discount it too quickly because of what is now perceived as the pre-arranged character of an antiquated synthesis. Despite the premodern notion of biblical exegesis as sanctioned by ecclesiastical authority, the synthetic nature of Christian medieval thought as coordinating exegetical form with theological content may well be worth a reexamination. While the Enlightenment largely invalidated church control in matters of scriptural interpretation, it did not thereby inaugurate a democracy of exegetical opinions, as the scepter of authority was passed instead from the ecclesiastical to the academic hierarchy.⁶ Although professional exegetes consider the academic study of the Bible no longer a mere outgrowth of its theological role as source of transcendent meaning, it can be argued that more often than not they continue to treat it as a privileged text. In so doing they maintain what amounts to the secular equivalent of a theological claim on Scripture. This claim,

by Irenaeus of Lyon, composed after 190 CE, in which the correct interpretation of scripture as integrating Old and New Testament is directly premised on the believer's adherence to the Rule of Faith. See L.M. Froidevaux (ed.), *Irénée de Lyon. Démonstration de la prédication apostolique*. SC 62 (Paris, 1959). Although it is to a certain extent true that orthodoxy would henceforth interfere with the outcome of exegesis, the reverse is also true, that is that the Bible increasingly permeated classical culture. On the latter process, see F.M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁶ In an illustrative caricature of the dominance of historical-critical scholarship in biblical studies, W. Neil recounts how in the nineteenth century Joseph Parker of the City Temple resisted higher criticism in the following terms: 'I am jealous lest the Bible should in any sense be made a priest's book. Even Baur or Colenso may, contrary to his own wishes, be almost unconsciously elevated into a literary deity under whose approving nod alone we can read the Bible with any edification. . . . Have we to await a communication from Tübingen or a telegram from Oxford before we can read the Bible?' See 'The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible, 1700–1950,' in: S.L. Greenslade (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. III: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day (Cambridge, 1963), 286. This episode is mentioned by Gabriel Josipovici, 'The Bible in Focus,' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 48 (1990): 107.

which has only recently begun to be challenged, is rooted in the postulate that knowledge of the Bible's compositional origins holds the key to the unfolding of its truths.⁷ Unlike the Middle Ages, what qualifies as true in the exegetical paradigm of the Enlightenment and hence unites the individual truths of different exegetical theories is no longer primarily the interaction with contemporary theological debate but rather a shared faith in the accuracy of historical reconstruction.⁸ Due in part to the rapid development of the exegetical guild, the formal discourse of scriptural exegesis has thus become more and more disconnected from the modulations of contemporaneous theological discussion, which in turn caused the inquiry into the nature of scriptural truths to recede into the background.⁹

Despite the incentive in modern academia to come up with novel solutions, the exegetical meaning of Scripture reaches rarely outside the well-trodden ground of its compositional timeframe. The birth of historical-critical exegesis, which has been largely responsible for this change in exegetical direction from participating in and contributing to wider theological debates to consolidating and solidifying the meaning of the text based on the uncovering of its historical origins,¹⁰ seems to have narrowed the universal referentiality of

⁷ Though frequently presented as historical introductions to the world of New Testament literature, introductions to the New Testament are often based on implicit theological claims. See e.g. Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard Clark Kee (Nashville, 1975), 28–29. For a more properly historical treatment of New Testament literature, see Helmut Köster, *Einführung in das Neue Testament im Rahmen der Religionsgeschichte und Kulturgeschichte der hellenistischen und römischen Zeit* (Berlin/New York, 1980).

⁸ Hans W. Frei's description of historical criticism is indicative of the distance separating the Enlightenment view from the medieval view of biblical authority: 'Historical-critical method meant that putative claims of fact in the Bible were subjected to independent investigations to test their veracity and that it was not guaranteed by the authority of the Bible itself. It meant explaining the thoughts of the biblical authors and the origin and shape of the writings on the basis of the most likely, natural, and specific conditions of history, culture, and individual life out of which they arose'. See Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London, 1974), 18.

⁹ For a contemporary attempt to read Scripture with a keen eye for its theological signification, see David Tracy, 'On Reading the Scriptures Theologically,' in: Bruce D. Marshall (ed.), *Theology and Dialogue. Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame, 1990), 35–68. For a typology of modern theology according to its integration of biblical interpretation, see Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, ed. G. Hunsinger and W.C. Placher (New Haven, 1992), 28–55 and esp. 56–69.

¹⁰ For a solid analysis of the development of the historical-critical method and

Scripture. Inasmuch as attempts at theological signification are still being made, most exegetical theories have a single focus: to proclaim human salvation. On the one hand, this points to a certain constant in the development of modern biblical scholarship. Echoing the thrust of the Reformation, itself a movement propelled by a deep-seated feeling of human anxiety, historical-critical exegesis has tried to find reassurance in recapturing the mindframe of the earliest apostolic communities by sorting out their reception of and reaction to the gospel. Given precisely the radical and all-embracing scope with which the gospel presents itself as a message with divine implications, as it appears to have been received in the early church, it is hard to fathom that its implications would halt at the salvation of an individual life or a historical body, i.e. the church. At the implicit core of the gospel is an intrinsic universality as well as an infinite expansiveness;¹¹ preached to every creature, it should reach the ends of the earth. To this infinite expansiveness the 'theologizing' texts of the twelfth century appear to have been particularly sensitive.

When the gospel first resonated throughout the Hellenistic world, its message of universality naturally implied that the intellectual heritage of its receiving culture would not be despised. In light of the prominence of Middle- and Neo-Platonic philosophy in the Hellenistic world, this concretely meant that Christianity focused attention on the speculative problems that were brought to the fore by this philosophical tradition. The referentiality of Scripture hence expanded to include problems of metaphysics and cosmology, thereby embedding the position of humanity in a more properly universal context.¹² As

its relation to Catholic theology, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'Historical Criticism: Its Role in Biblical Interpretation and Church Life,' *Theological Studies* 50 (1989): 244–59. Fitzmyer's claim that the roots of the historical-critical method are found in the Renaissance and not in the Reformation seems premised on a distinction between Renaissance and Reformation that is historically artificial.

¹¹ In comparing Christianity with Islam, W.C. Smith argues that the latter is more properly a religion of the book than the former and that the role of the Qur'an in Islam resembles more that of Christ than that of the Bible in Christianity. 'For Christians, God's central revelation is in the person of Christ, with the Bible as the record of that revelation', see Smith, *What is Scripture*, 46. It is in regarding Scripture as setting in motion a continuous process of human interpretive activity based on God's central revelation in Christ that I have described the gospel here as a message of infinite expansiveness.

¹² One thinks of the example of Origen here (ca. 185–ca. 254 CE), whose *De principiis* links exegesis inextricably with cosmological speculation.

exegesis and cosmology grew more and more intimate, an alliance between the salvation of humanity and that of the surrounding universe was forged that would last throughout much of the tradition of early Christian and medieval theology.

Just as science seems to have receded behind the horizon in most contemporary theology, however, so the cosmos has ceased to play much of a part in contemporary exegesis. With a medieval assessment of this problem, one might say that Nature and Scripture have lost much of their former affinity. Before engaging in an analysis of their breakdown, which this chapter intends to explore as a development which heavily influenced twelfth-century intellectual life, it is important to emphasize how medieval theology built indeed upon the symmetry not just of authority and reason, faith and understanding, or nature and grace—all of which have since become prominent conceptual pairs in theological analysis, reaching far beyond this period—, but even more crucially on that of Nature and Scripture. As the paradigmatic embodiment of how medieval thought strove to harmonize form and content, this latter pair seems effectively to underlie all of the former ones in providing them with their material base. It is the crumbling of this medieval base, eerily foreshadowing the modern disjunction of Nature and Scripture that will be at the center of the analysis that follows.

B. *The Balance of Nature and Scripture*

The balance of Nature and Scripture forms such an essential substrate of medieval theology that one is at a loss to find precise explanations of it. As hinted at above, a larger justification may be found in the Neoplatonic mindset, attuned to capturing the symphonic harmony of cosmic chords, that permeated most medieval thinking prior to the scholastic age. Thus Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* (± 400 CE) aligned words (including the words of Scripture) and created things by regarding them both as signs (*signa*) whose primary function was to point beyond themselves to the only true reality (*res*) which it was worthwhile to know, namely the Trinity.¹³ Far from becoming an isolated area of knowledge, however, the Trinity opened

¹³ See Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* I.I.1 to I.V.5, ed. Green (Oxford, 1995), 12–16.

up other areas of inquiry, notably the exploration of the human soul, which Augustine saw as shaped in a Trinitarian image. Yet in a noteworthy connection, Augustine's most perceptive and sustained analysis of the soul in the *Confessions* leads him in its last three books to a remarkable study of Genesis' creation account, as if to underscore that, notwithstanding the importance of the individual soul, the most powerful celebration of the efficacy of the divine word lies in the natural realm of creation.¹⁴

Through a different Neoplatonic intermediary, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (fl. 500), the Middle Ages inherited a remarkably fecund theological method by which the transcendence of the divine was best approached through a dialectic of affirmative and negative predication. In his theology of the *Divine Names*—the variety of names by which Scripture refers to God—, Dionysius justified his novel dialectic of affirmative and negative theology by claiming that Scripture is as much about hiding the divine by veiling its mysterious nature in symbols as about unveiling or revealing it.¹⁵ Hence it is no wonder that Scripture portrays the divine even as worm.¹⁶ Although written in a different vein from Augustine, Dionysius' works likewise underscore the value and validity of cosmic and symbolic language in their attempt to evince the transcendent meaning of Scripture.

In addition to tracking down examples of the interplay between Scripture and Nature in such authors as Augustine and Dionysius, to which Eriugena's name should be especially added as he introduced the Greek notion of Nature and Scripture as the double vestment of Christ,¹⁷ we should not omit that a crucial role in this came

¹⁴ Cf. *Confessions* XI–XIII. Robert McMahon has tried to integrate Augustine's use of these different genres (the autobiographical story of his conversion and the exegesis of Genesis) with his overall literary plan in writing the *Confessions*. See his *Augustine's Prayerful Ascent. An Essay on the Literary Form of the Confessions* (Athens and London, 1989), esp. chs. 2 and 3.

¹⁵ See Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), Part IV: The Divine Names. On p. 134 Rorem lists as the two main characteristics of the *Divine Names* the dialectic between the divinity as hidden beyond being and yet revealed, and the insistence on the exclusive use of the Christian scriptures for this revelation. For a comprehensive analysis of Dionysius' world view, see René Roques, *L'Univers dionysien. Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys* (Paris, 1983). See pp. 209–34 on the role of Scripture and its relation to tradition.

¹⁶ Cf. Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy* II 5, PG 3: 145A, with reference to Ps. 22:7.

¹⁷ In *Periphyseon* III 723D, ed. Sheldon-Williams (Dublin, 1981), 264 Eriugena compares *creatura* (in this case avoiding the term *natura*, for which he coined his

to be played by scripture itself. Following the osmosis of exegesis and cosmology in the Hellenistic world as a result of the intrinsic universality attributed to the scriptural message, medieval exegetes could read certain passages of Scripture as indicating to them that its transcendent referentiality pointed beyond humanity to the whole of creation.

A look at the Vulgate text of Romans 1:20 (*Invisibilia enim ipsius, a creatura mundi, per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur*)¹⁸—frequently employed in patristic and medieval theology to justify a naturalistic exegesis of Scripture—, can help us approximate how Scripture itself came to be read as intimating its underlying affinity with nature. In the standard medieval exegesis of this text St. Paul is seen here as revealing how from the beginning of creation God's invisible nature has been understood through his manifestation in the things that are made. Three implications arising from the medieval reading of this Romans-text are especially worth examining as background to this operative balance of Nature and Scripture in medieval theology. In the first place, the Romans-text imparts a certain methodological primacy to comprehending the cosmos. By arguing that the invisible things of God can be known through an understanding of the things that are made, in medieval eyes Paul seemed to hint at an underlying order in which knowledge of God was preceded, if not conditioned, by knowledge of the works of nature. In this view nature was clearly seen as God's handiwork, and hence assigned to an ontologically inferior status, but since the product opens up the invisible aspects of its maker, knowledge of nature could yet provide us with an epistemological edge. Secondly, by harboring this message within the corpus of its text, Scripture itself not only suggests but even sanctions this other avenue to the divine through nature, thereby

own usage) and *scriptura* as the two vestments of Christ at his Transfiguration. On this passage, derived from Maximus the Confessor's *Ambigua*, and its wider use in Eriugena, see Maieul Cappuyns, *Jean Scot Erigène. Sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (1933; repr. Bruxelles, 1969), 276–80 and W. Otten, 'The Parallelism of Nature and Scripture: Reflections on Eriugena's Incarnational Exegesis,' in: G. van Riel, C. Steel and J. McEvoy (eds), *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena. The Bible and Hermeneutics* (Leuven, 1996), 85–88. See also Donald F. Duclow, 'Nature as Speech and Book in John Scotus Eriugena,' *Mediaevalia* 3 (1977): 131–40. It is important to remember that through his translation of the Dionysian corpus Eriugena played a major role in the dissemination of Dionysian thought in the early Middle Ages.

¹⁸ 'The invisible things of God are perceived from the creation of the world, being understood through the things that are made'.

relativizing, if not sacrificing completely, the priority of verbal revelation over other 'texts' in the realm of divine signification. It appeared as if the medieval exegesis of Romans 1:20 forged an effective link between Bible and creation, as word and world became ever more similar conduits of divine knowledge. This then led to a third and final implication of the medieval reading of this Romans-passage, as Nature and Scripture began effectively to function as commensurate sources of revealed truth. Since they were proven neither dependent on each other nor mutually exclusive, it could be assumed that their independent scrutiny yielded comparable access to the divine. What's more, collectively they would only enrich our understanding of God.

While the above cited passage from Romans opens up numerous possibilities to compare the realms of Nature and Scripture, most of our authors, as if to quench over-exuberant enthusiasm, would qualify their final understanding of God in the end as only a foretaste of divine truth. According to another passage from St. Paul, 1 Cor. 13:12 (*. . . nunc videmus per speculum in aenigmate: tunc autem facie ad faciem*),¹⁹ whatever knowledge was to result from the study of Nature and Scripture ought not to be confused with divine truth itself. Human knowledge of the divine is by definition deceptive, therefore, for it is bound to fracture the unobstructed clarity of divine light. The reason why human knowledge is overshadowed by such dark clouds they traced back to the scriptural event following upon the heels of the creation story, i.e., Adam's fall and ejection from paradise. Just as the exile from paradise forced the human body to toil and labor in the fields, so it compelled the mind to find its path in the shadows, as a living memory of humanity's sustained need for redemptive grace.²⁰

¹⁹ 'For now we see as through a glass darkly, but then we will see face to face . . .'

²⁰ Although the interpretation of the fall as plunging humanity into a kind of epistemological darkness is true to Augustine's theology, his interpretation of paradise and humanity's fall is nevertheless clearly framed as a historical one. A complex semi-allegorical reading of the fall which draws directly upon the parallelism of Nature and Scripture is found in Eriugena, *Periphyseon* IV 744B, ed. Jeauneau, CCCM 164: 5; trans. PP IV, ed. Jeauneau and trans. O'Meara (Dublin, 1995), 6–7: 'For reason is commanded to eat its bread 'in the sweat of its brow' [Gen. 3:19], and to till the earth of sacred scripture, 'sprouting forth thorns and thistles' [Gen. 3:18], that is a thin crop of interpretations of what is divine, and to follow the study of wisdom, closed to those who spurn it, with the unflagging steps of investigation. . . .' Eriugena continues this passage by referring to humanity's need

The vision of God that would result from these and similar analyses was by definition a refractive one. But it was not thereby unreflective of its divine origin. It rather seemed as if the truth was deliberately parceled piecemeal, so as to fit the restrictions of the limited human mind that was to receive, contemplate and expound it. To explore the vast realms of Nature and Scripture with any kind of accuracy, the authors under review here had to be doubly aware of the structure and strategies open to the human mind. For not only was it the entity through which they could effectively connect Nature and Scripture, but during the course of their projects it might enable them to intercept a glimpse of unmediated divine truth. It is this very aspect that goes to the core of the humanist outlook of their texts.

II *The Modern Disjunction of Nature and Scripture*

This introductory sketch of the history of scriptural interpretation, so I am well aware, has not done full justice to the achievements of modern exegesis. More specifically, beside the historical-critical approach I have not mentioned other exegetical methods, notably more literary ones, which could broaden our outlook on the exegetical spectrum.²¹ In the context of this book, however, it would go altogether too far to hold any particular method of post-medieval biblical interpretation accountable for the modern imbalance of Nature and Scripture. When uttering the truism that the cosmos has receded behind the horizon of modern exegesis, we need to seek the reasons

for grace to recapture the truth of scriptural contemplation, which was lost after the fall. On Eriugena's semi-allegorical view of paradise, see W. Otten, 'The Pedagogical Aspect of Eriugena's Eschatology: Paradise between the Letter and the Spirit,' in: J. McEvoy and M. Dunne (eds), *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time* (Leuven, 2002), 509–26.

²¹ See the following examples of a more literary and/or hermeneutical approach to the area of biblical studies: Paul Ricoeur, 'Biblical Hermeneutics', *Semeia* 4 (1975): 29–148; Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, 1979); Edgar V. McKnight, *The Bible and the Reader. An Intro to Literary Criticism* (Philadelphia, 1985); Josipovici, 'The Bible in Focus,' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 48 (1990): 101–122; Amos N. Wilder, *The Bible and the Literary Critic* (Minneapolis, 1991); Jason P. Rosenblatt and Joseph C. Sitterson Jr., 'Not in Heaven'. *Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 1991). See further *Theological Studies* 50.2 (1989) and, in general, the journals *Semeia* and *Biblical Interpretation*.

for those changes as much in the changed perception of nature as in the development of biblical exegesis. It is the particular importance of the twelfth century as bringing about this changed view of nature that I want to explore in what follows below.

To set the twelfth-century developments in context, I wish to draw another comparison, referring this time to a modern study devoted specifically to the disintegration of the ontotheological world view that had long held together the various epistemological and metaphysical projects that developed throughout western thought. In his book *Passage to Modernity*, Louis Dupré has eminently examined the different sets of conditions that lie behind what can be seen as the modern disintegration of Nature and Culture, giving a careful and complex analysis of the breakdown of this ontotheological synthesis.²² Dupré's study presents itself as a hermeneutical one which harbors as one of its goals to demonstrate how the viability of the premodern stages of Western culture, such as the medieval one, hinged in large part on the success of their efforts to integrate the role of the divine with that of both the cosmos and the human self.

In one passage of this fascinating study which is directly relevant to our discussion here, Dupré expresses his admiration for the theological culture of the medieval period as representing a synthesis of Nature and Grace. In his view it was largely due to the development of late medieval nominalism that Nature lost its synthesis with Grace which had been operative throughout much of the medieval period. By disconnecting the *potestas absoluta* of the divine from its *potestas ordinata* in creation, the development of late medieval nominalism brought about a discrepancy between God's volitional actions and their intelligible reflections in the workings of nature. In doing so nominalism created not only a more independent sphere for the mechanical workings of nature but, in a more far-reaching implication, it also disturbed the rational equilibrium of medieval theology. By severing the logic of the divine will from its reflection in manifest creation, where it could adequately, even though imperfectly, be

²² Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity. An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven and London, 1994). Dupré analyzes this break-up as constituting in fact a double one, namely that between the transcendent constituent and its cosmic-human counterpart and that between the person and the cosmos (p. 3). It would seem to me that in his analysis the development of late medieval nominalism contributed predominantly to the first of these two break-ups, which is also the one I am most concerned with in this book.

grasped by the human mind, the physical world was left to its own devices, with God receding into an ever more remote heavenly sphere. As a consequence of this late medieval development, the existence of an integrative theological and metaphysical tradition could no longer be maintained. No longer would the study of nature yield results which through their innate compatibility with divine revelation adumbrated the perfection that awaited all human attempts to know God.²³

When comparing Dupré's view of a quasi-autonomous nature and its erosive impact on the balance of Nature and Grace to our above analysis of Nature and Scripture, we have the exact opposite. In Dupré's vision, we are likewise confronted with a dissolution, caused here by changes in the interpretation of nature, as its emancipation leads to an ejection of the divine from creation. Consequently, we arrive at a dismantling of the medieval synthesis of Nature and Grace. Dupré sees the late medieval disappearance of this synthesis alluding to a general impoverishment of cosmology in modernity, with theological considerations falling almost entirely outside its purview. Dupré finds a major push towards the further disintegration of Nature and Grace in the naturalistic philosophy of the Italian renaissance, with figures such as Giordano Bruno. After a brief integrative countermovement, which was successful in the Baroque, the disjunction of nature and culture was all but complete.²⁴ Although *Passage to Modernity* steers clear of cultural pessimism, few signs after the Enlightenment point to a reintegration of the cosmos with the divine, as contemporary philosophy and theology both seem unable to overcome the gap between Nature and Grace.

In describing the breakdown of the Western ontotheological synthesis, Dupré's analysis, as said, circles largely around the categories of Nature and Grace, the polar complementarity of which he assumes to have been unintermittently operative from Augustine through Aquinas. At times, however, his discourse evokes rather insightfully the existence of a certain reciprocity between Nature and Scripture,²⁵

²³ For Dupré's analysis of 'The Disintegration of the Medieval Synthesis', see *Passage to Modernity*, 174–81. Dupré locates this disintegration generally in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, although he notes on p. 170 that a first theological dispute over nature and grace begins in the thirteenth.

²⁴ On Bruno, see *Passage to Modernity*, 182–86. On the synthesis of the Baroque, see 237–48.

²⁵ Dupré discusses the parallelism of Nature and Scripture only in the context of the twelfth century, see *Passage to Modernity*, 35 and 102–03.

which he—in contrast to this book's more historical perspective—sees ultimately as a subset of Nature and Grace. Thus he can fondly recall the poetry and literature of the twelfth century as representing the apex of medieval nature symbolism. Basking in the light of divine grace, nature developed into an important theological vehicle which, when properly seized upon by the human mind, served to evince the fullness of creational splendor.²⁶ This sums up Dupré's high regard for twelfth-century culture. In the arising parallelism of macrocosm and microcosm, nature was often compared to a book—its words echoing the divine word itself—, whose reading enabled humanity to broaden its cosmological horizon and, more importantly, to discover also itself.²⁷ To underline what he calls the sacramental attitude towards nature, Dupré quotes a stanza from the poem which made Alan of Lille famous:

<i>Omnis mundi creatura,</i>	The whole created world
<i>quasi liber et pictura</i>	Like a book and a picture,
<i>nobis est in speculum.</i> ²⁸	Serves us as a mirror.

It is an example of how the study of nature, seen as integral product of the divine, hones and heightens the sensibility of human observation. Though deeply admiring of Dupré's study, not least because of its sensitive appreciation of the 'theologizing' outlook of medieval culture, I want to modify its thesis concerning the disintegration of Nature and Grace on two counts. First, just as I argued above that the development of scriptural study alone cannot be held responsible for the disintegration of Nature and Scripture, because it involved a drifting apart of two entities, so I likewise hold that cosmological developments alone could not and did not impel the medieval synthesis to unravel.²⁹ This applies both to the synthesis of Nature and

²⁶ Dupré's observations about the twelfth century, as are my own, are guided in part by the groundbreaking study by M.-D. Chenu O.P., *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century. Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, trans. J. Taylor and L.K. Little (1957; Chicago, 1968), especially chapters 1 to 3.

²⁷ On the idea of the book of nature in the Middle Ages, see E.R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948; Bern, ¹⁰1984), 323–29.

²⁸ See *Passage to Modernity*, 35. The full Latin text and a translation of Alan's poem are found in the appendix to this chapter.

²⁹ In fairness to the complexity and comprehensiveness of Dupré's analysis, it should be stated that he sees not just the concept of nature undergoing a rapid development in the late Middle Ages, but also that of grace, see Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*, 174–76.

Grace and to that of Nature and Scripture. Second, if we accept that a remarkable affinity of Nature and Grace, in Dupré's case, or Nature and Scripture, in the context of this book, permeated the theologizing culture of the Middle Ages, then a hypothesis concerning their disjunction must engage as much the issue of their connectedness as the scope of their distinct contributions. In fact, I see a first crack in the theologizing culture of the twelfth century—a century not only praised for its natural symbolism but also for its great advances in the realm of scriptural exegesis—precisely on the point of the connectedness between Nature and Scripture as reciprocal hermeneutical categories.³⁰ The rest of this chapter will analyze why it was that the balance of Nature and Scripture began to disintegrate, as the twelfth-century renaissance, amidst a flurry of intellectual activity, foreboded the quiet decline of this age-long paradigm that seemed inherent in the theologizing culture of the Christian west. For that, we shall have to explore the Chartrian project once again, focusing especially on their practitioners' use of *integumentum*.

III *Losing the Balance: Nature and Scripture in the Twelfth Century*

A. *Rhetoric and Cosmology in the School of Chartres*

As has been observed by many students of the twelfth-century renaissance, and was rightly reiterated by Dupré, a significant resurgence of cosmological interest characterizes the intellectual culture of this period. Led by the legendary figure of Bernard of Chartres, a group of philosophers commonly designated as the Chartrians—some of whom had been his students but not all of whom taught actually at

³⁰ For the twelfth-century advances in scriptural exegesis, especially in the realm of literal exegesis, see the classic account by Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 1964), ch. 3 on the Victorines and ch. 4 on Andrew of St. Victor. In recent years the study of twelfth-century exegesis has progressed much beyond Smalley's attention to the Victorines. See Jean Châtillon, 'La Bible dans les écoles du XII^e siècle', in: Pierre Riché and Guy Lobrichon (eds), *Le Moyen Âge et la Bible*. Bible de tous les temps, vol. 4 (Paris, 1984), 163–97. See also Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), vol. I ch. 4 (*Sacra pagina*) for an overview of twelfth-century exegetical developments with regard to the Psalms and the Pauline corpus, and G.R. Evans, *The Language and Logic of the Bible. The Earlier Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984) for the transition from exegesis to doctrine and theological science.

Chartres—, engaged in what seems to have been a collective though not necessarily orchestrated attempt to penetrate the workings of nature with the force of human reason.³¹ The aim of the Chartrians was to arrive at an all-pervasive rational grasp of the natural universe, not for utilitarian purposes but to underscore the validity of traditional Platonic and Macrobian teaching about the cosmos by demonstrating its continuity with the Christian account of creation.³²

Before proceeding further it is important to make two preliminary comments about the role of the Chartrians in the twelfth century. First, while we have already pointed out that the so-called Chartrian authors were not an organized collective, it seems their works can responsibly be grouped together, as we will do with some reluctance here. The observation of an affinity among their texts, however, should not delude us into thinking that they thereby represent a unified method on the canvas of twelfth-century learning. Though we should not lose sight of their individual differences, there is a greater danger of leaving out their works altogether. Since they share a cosmological outlook, it is easy to sidetrack them as unconnected with the semantic developments that gave rise to scholasticism, which is consequently baptized ever more quickly as the up and coming approach of twelfth-century theology.³³ Advocating a broader and more open approach to Chartrian thinking, and to the transparency of twelfth-century intellectual culture at large, this book shall explore some of the methodological links with other prominent twelfth-century figures as well. His dialectical skills notwithstanding, it seemed Peter Abelard also strove hard to harmonize pagan cosmological teaching with theological and scriptural study.³⁴

³¹ See above ch. 1.VI on the controversy surrounding the existence of the so-called School of Chartres.

³² On the influence of the commentary on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* written by the African author and encyclopedist Macrobius around 400 CE, see Edouard Jeuneau, 'Macrobe, source du platonisme chartrain,' *Studi medievali* 3a Serie, 1 (1960): 3–24. For the influence of Plato's *Timaeus* on twelfth-century thought, see Tullio Gregory, 'The Platonic Inheritance,' in: P. Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), 54–80.

³³ Although reduced to a single chapter on Thierry of Chartres and William of Conches, the Chartrians still play a role in R.W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, Vol. II: The Heroic Age (Oxford, 2001), 66–90. See also C. Stephen Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels. Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia, 1994), 278–291 on twelfth-century humanism.

³⁴ T. Gregory acknowledges Abelard's Platonic and Macrobian influence, see his

My second point touches on the marginalization suffered by the Chartrian texts in quite another sense. Due no doubt to their intense focus on the rational structure of the cosmos and their remarkable interest in the previously neglected disciplines of the *quadrivium*, the orthodoxy of the Chartrians was sometimes called into question. One reason for this lies no doubt in the highly competitive nature of the twelfth-century intellectual scene. Amidst the chaos of many new theological approaches fighting for simultaneous recognition, questioning the orthodoxy of a particular method was a sure way to avoid having to disprove its theological adequacy. Abelard's first condemnation at Soissons in 1121 is a good example of this. If one factors in, however, that much of the thought by Chartrians and others exhibits an inherently experimental tendency, one may be swayed to reconsider the fact of their questionable stance. When William of Conches admits to leaving out the comparison he had drawn earlier in his *Philosophia mundi* between the Platonic World Soul and the Holy Spirit, his confession in the *Dragmaticon* is more revealing of the flexibility that goes with true experiments than that it should discredit him as a repentant heretic.³⁵

Whether or not one accepts the doctrinal orthodoxy and/or cosmological accuracy of the Chartrians as meritorious, it is clear that their overriding concern was to present a watertight view of the cosmos as organic and intrinsically comprehensible.³⁶ Whether their principle of cosmic intelligibility should ultimately be deemed a sacramental

'The Platonic Inheritance,' 58–60. Nonetheless he qualifies Abelard's exegesis as 'an extreme development of the use of the *Timaeus* and the philosophical tradition connected with it' (p. 60).

³⁵ In his early work *Philosophia* I, IV § 13, William of Conches compared the World Soul of the *Timaeus* to the Holy Spirit, see *Philosophia*, ed. Maurach (Pretoria, 1980), 22–23. William became the subject of a fierce attack by William of St. Thierry, friend and collaborator of Bernard of Clairvaux. See his *De erroribus Guillelmi de Conchis ad sanctum Bernardum*, ed. J. Leclercq, *Revue Bénédictine* 79 (1969): 375–91. In his later work *Dragmaticon* I.1.8, William of Conches omits his earlier comparison but makes an allusive comment. See *Dragmaticon*, ed. I. Ronca (Turnhout, 1997), CCCM 152: 7: *uerba enim non faciunt haereticum, sed defensio* ('Not the words make a heretic, but their defense'). For a further analysis of this work, see below chapter 3.

³⁶ For a summary of Chartrian cosmological thinking, see J.M. Parent, O.P., *La doctrine de la création dans l'école de Chartres* (Paris/Ottawa, 1938), 5–112. See also Tullio Gregory, *Anima Mundi. La filosofia di Guglielmo di Conches e la scuola di Chartres* (Firenze, 1955). Gregory hails Chartrian thought for endowing nature with an autonomous value, see his *Anima mundi*, 176.

or a rational one may ultimately be less relevant than, for reducible to, their strong sense that the laws of the cosmos are governed by a rational structure that is compatible with the structure of human thought.³⁷ In realizing this, it is important to note that early medieval logic did not yet possess the compelling and objectifying force of later scholastic reasoning, as it was closely related to the other arts of the *trivium*, namely grammar and rhetoric. While some early medieval masters like Anselm of Canterbury had pushed the limits of grammatical arguments to unknown heights, as his ontological argument had better be called a grammatical one, and others were able to excel in all three, like Peter Abelard, for purposes of this chapter it is best to group the collective contribution of the Chartrian masters under the art of rhetoric.³⁸ Concentrating on the rhetorical undercurrent of their thinking may encourage us to study their traditional commentaries on classical texts and their innovative cosmological experiments in tandem.

One of the most fertile rhetorical concepts explored by the Chartrians, introduced in the first chapter, was that of *integumentum* or wrapping.³⁹ Its use enabled them to harmonize discordant texts such as classical and Christian ones by differentiating between the literary form as an outward covering and the material content underlying it as the kernel of truth. The dialectical play thus set in motion gave rise to endless variations in Chartrian thinking. It could indeed be that form and content were opposed as appearance and truth. This is the case, for example, when they attempt to reconcile the

³⁷ Hence the importance of the interrelation of macro- and microcosm as a notable feature of Chartrian thought. Wetherbee comments on the anthropological implications of the Chartrian ideas, see his article 'Philosophy, Cosmology and the Twelfth Century Renaissance,' in: Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, 25.

³⁸ When referring to rhetoric here, I do not mean to suggest a contrast with the other arts of the *trivium* but rather to point to the specific twelfth-century role of rhetoric as an important vehicle in the interplay of poetry and philosophy and/or theology. See Richard McKeon, 'Poetry and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century: the Renaissance of Rhetoric,' in: R.S. Crane et al. (ed.), *Critics and Criticism. Ancient and Modern* (Chicago, 1952), 297–318, esp. 315. Grammar and rhetoric were closely related in the twelfth century, while rhetoric could also be seen as a branch of dialectic. Of the Chartrians, William of Conches was described by his pupil John of Salisbury as a grammarian, just as Bernard of Chartres, while Thierry was considered a rhetorician. For a general overview of medieval rhetoric, see James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages. A History of Rhetorical Theory from St. Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1974).

³⁹ See above ch. 1.VII (The End of Twelfth-Century Humanism), pp. 39–44.

nature of pagan myth with the expository truth of Christian teaching. But it does not always have to be as explicit or stark a contrast as that between 'good and evil', or 'letter and spirit', which the use of *integumentum* evokes. A more symmetrical dialectic is that between the veiling and unveiling of divine truth, as in its form and content seem more equally relevant. It is this dialectic that may well have tempted Peter Abelard into considering even the parables in the gospel as *integumenta*. While it is true that beneath their narrative form there resides the kernel of divine truth, the form of the parable is also sacred, since it is the word of Christ himself.⁴⁰

Setting off form against content in perennial contrast, the use of *integumentum* reveals an innate dialectical tension, which lends in the end a certain indeterminacy to the concept. It is precisely this indeterminacy which sets it apart from the more directional use of allegory in twelfth-century scriptural exegesis, inasmuch as the pluriformity inherent in the concept precludes that any of its applications, i.e., the pairing of one image with one concept, be considered definitive. Just as one image can give rise to sundry concepts, so a single concept may be discovered underlying various images. The notion of *integumentum*, more than any other early medieval rhetorical concept including allegory, seems thus endowed with a kind of self-propelling inexhaustibility.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See E. Jeaneau, 'L'usage de la notion d'*integumentum* à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 32 (1957): 37 n. 4, repr. in: E. Jeaneau, *Lectio philosophorum. Recherches sur l'école de Chartres* (Amsterdam, 1973), 129 n. 4. In *Theologia 'Scholarium'* I.165 Abelard states how in Mc 4:11–12 Christ spoke to his apostles *de integumento parabolarum*, when he revealed how they could grasp the mystery about the Kingdom of God, while others needed parables because they could neither see nor comprehend. Abelard's reference to *integumentum* as a figure of speech resorted to by Christ is important, since Abelard legitimizes his Trinitarian theology by grounding it in Christ's own words. As indicated in *Theologia Christiana* I.1, divine wisdom itself revealed the names of the divine persons through the words of the incarnate Christ. See chapter 4 below, pp. 151–52 and n. 39.

⁴¹ Although *integumentum* is generally seen as the secular rhetorical equivalent of biblical allegory, the polyvalence Jeaneau detects in the Chartrian use of *integumentum*, to the extent that the same meaning can be conveyed by the use of different *integumenta* while the same *integumentum* can also have different meanings, seems rarely matched in twelfth-century allegorical exegesis. See Jeaneau, 'L'usage de notion d'*integumentum*,' 41. A notable exception is the virtuoso handling of tropological exegesis by the rhetorically gifted Bernard of Clairvaux. On Bernard's exegesis, see M.B. Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought. Broken Dreams* (Leiden, 1994), Part IV ch. 7 (The Gems of Christmas: the Sermons on the Nativity and Abstract Art).

Abelard's inventive use of *integumentum* to interpret the gospel parables gives us a first glance into the possible far-reaching effects of this concept when extended beyond its limited technical scope. Following Abelard's example, we will use it here to analyze the parallelism of Nature and Scripture, in an effort to pinpoint what I see as the beginning of their disintegration in Chartrian thought. As the rhetorical tool that allowed them to dissect the universe with the force of human reason, it seems the Chartrians confidently seized upon this notion to show that their results were compatible with Christian doctrine. In their unbending loyalty to the adage from Romans, whereby visible creation revealed God's invisible nature, they became convinced that a rightful exploration of Nature would not undermine the Christian account of creation, but would only enrich its understanding. Yet while that account had long exhibited a semi-fixed scriptural character, as it was loosely based on the first chapters of Genesis, the rapid intellectual developments of the twelfth century applied such stringent norms to what counted as Christian doctrine that artless references to it were no longer sufficient. It became increasingly more difficult to convince a more diversified but also more partisan theological audience that the Chartrian interpretation of nature was acceptable.⁴²

As they continued their cosmological experiments, the Chartrians sought to secure the affinity between Nature and Scripture through an ever more complex use of *integumentum*. As a result of their activity, the twelfth century witnesses a paradoxical phenomenon. On the one hand, the Chartrian use of rhetorical technique appears to bring the natural affinity of Nature and Scripture to new heights, which explains Dupré's admiration for their Nature symbolism. On the other hand, it seems their growing practice of cloaking the analogy of Nature and Scripture in poetic language gradually made their readers lose track of the exegetical implications of their attempt to transform the polarity of transcendent creator and finite creation into a dynamic interrelation of macro- and microcosm. While their recourse to poetry is on one level simply an alternative to the expository dis-

⁴² In an insightful article, Eileen Sweeney has pointed to a different but closely related centrifugal tendency in twelfth-century theology, namely the growing divergence between scripture and dialectical theology. See her 'Rewriting the Narrative of Scripture: Twelfth-Century Debates over Reason and Theological Form,' *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 3 (1993): 1–34.

course of scholastic theology, it increasingly came to represent what would become an insurmountable problem not just for the Chartrians but for all theologians in their aftermath, namely how to keep the realms of Nature and Scripture connected through an unobtrusive framework of interpretation. As their ideas went no longer unchallenged in the competitive theological climate of the twelfth century, the Chartrians' sophisticated use of *integumentum* as a way to preserve that connection resulted ultimately in undermining it. Precisely how their masterful technique sowed the seeds of its own demise will be explored in the final section of this chapter.

To do so we shall take a brief look at two examples of Chartrian texts, an earlier commentary on Genesis by Thierry of Chartres written in the 1140s⁴³ and a later allegorical poem by Alan of Lille dated around 1160–1170. Studying these texts in sequence might enable us to go beyond a mere indication of their relative failure and success in an attempt to gauge the growing difficulty faced by the Chartrians to ensure the bond between Nature and Scripture through a responsible use of *integumentum*.

B. *The Sliding Connection of Nature and Scripture*

B. 1. *Physical Exegesis in Thierry of Chartres (d. after 1156)*

Belonging to the early generation of Chartrians, Thierry is a well-nigh perfect representative of Chartrian ideals.⁴⁴ Renowned for his commentaries on Boethius and Cicero, he is clearly rooted in the teaching of the liberal arts with its traditional emphasis on the *trivium*. He reconciled his literary inclinations with his cosmological concerns by writing a short treatise on the six days of creation, in which he relied heavily on the arts of the *quadrivium*. His so-called *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* is markedly different from earlier

⁴³ Häring dates the *Tractatus* before May 1140, when the identification of the World Soul as the Holy Spirit was condemned at the Council of Sens. See N.M. Häring S.A.C., *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and his School* (Toronto, 1971), 47. E. Maccagnolo refutes the interpretation that Thierry equates the World Soul and the Holy Spirit in his treatise and opts for a later date, see his *Rerum universitas: Saggio sulla filosofia di Teoderico di Chartres* (Firenze, 1976), 7 and 210–12. For Thierry's position on the World Soul and the Holy Spirit, see below n. 64.

⁴⁴ For an excellent overview of Thierry's contribution to twelfth-century learning, see the article 'Thierry of Chartres' by Peter Dronke in Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, 358–385.

examples in the Hexaemeron-genre in that it gives a physical alongside a literal interpretation of Genesis.⁴⁵ Thierry finds the moral and allegorical meaning of Genesis sufficiently stated by the Fathers, whose opinions need not be repeated.⁴⁶ While the first half of his treatise explains the physical generation of creation, the remaining part comments on the literal phrases of the Genesis-text.⁴⁷ Thus this commentary *secundum phisicam et ad litteram* is a near perfect example of the way in which the early Middle Ages regarded the relation of Nature and Scripture as an integrated one.⁴⁸

In the first part of his work *secundum phisicam* Thierry is primarily interested in explaining the causes from which the world drew its existence and the temporal order in which this process unfolded. Thierry sees four worldly causes at work during the six days of creation. These are an efficient cause (i.e., God), a formal cause (i.e., divine wisdom), a final cause (i.e., divine benignity) and a material cause (i.e., matter or the four elements). Taking his cue from the first words of Scripture (*In principio creavit Deus celum et terra*), Thierry argues that God in his capacity as efficient cause (*Deus*) first created matter or the material elements (*celum et terra*).⁴⁹ He sees the formal cause at work in the recurring Genesis-phrase 'And God said,' with God's act of speech referring specifically to divine wisdom as the

⁴⁵ For the text of Thierry's Genesis-commentary, see N.M. Häring S.A.C., *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and his School* (Toronto, 1971), 553–575. In what follows I will quote the Häring-edition according to chapter and line-numbers. The translations of Thierry are my own.

⁴⁶ See *Tractatus* 1. 3–6, ed. Häring, 555: 'And thereafter I will come to explain the historical sense of the letter so as to leave both the allegorical and moral reading entirely behind, since they have been clearly revealed by the Fathers'.

⁴⁷ The first part of the *Tractatus* runs from chs. 1 to 17 (ed. Häring, p. 562), where Thierry concludes that after describing the causes of the universe, he now will give a literal exposition: *De causis et de ordine temporum satis dictum est. Nunc ad expositionem littere ueniamus*. . . . The literal interpretation runs from chs. 18 to 47 (ed. Häring, p. 575), where the treatise breaks off, apparently unfinished.

⁴⁸ For various assessments of this treatise as a Chartrian piece, see N.M. Häring, 'The Creation and Creator of the World according to Thierry of Chartres and Clarembaldus of Arras,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 30 (1955): 137–82 and B. Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century. A Study of Bernard Silvestris* (Princeton, 1972), 240–53.

⁴⁹ See *Tractatus* 3. 35–40, ed. Häring, 556: 'Moses indicates this distinction between the causes in his book most clearly. For when he says "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" (Gen. 1:1) he signifies the efficient cause, namely God. He also demonstrates the material cause, namely the four elements, which he calls by the name of heaven and earth. And he confirms that they were indeed created by God when he says: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth" and so on'.

ordering principle in creation.⁵⁰ The final cause is indicated by the recurrent phrase 'And *God saw that it was good.*' This hints at the work of divine benignity, for God's vision of creation here is the equivalent of his love for it.⁵¹

A perceptive observer may surmise at this stage that Thierry's distinction between the divine causes as efficient, formal and final respectively, allows him to integrate the Christian notion of the Trinity into his physical exegesis.⁵² This is indeed the case, for Thierry explicitly states that the Father is creative power, the Son that wisdom which brings order out of chaos, and the Spirit divine benignity, through which Genesis signifies that God was not forced to create but was solely motivated by love. By adding the four elements (fire, water, earth and air) as the material cause of creation, however, Thierry de-emphasizes the radical contrast between the Trinitarian creator and the created world by intimating that creation somehow contributed to its own generation. Although this could have brought him perilously close to abandoning the traditional *creatio ex nihilo* idea, his repeated insistence (with reference to Gen. 1:1) that God created heaven and earth, i.e., fashioned the four elements, sufficiently secured the transcendence of the divine.⁵³

Once God had made the initial step of creating the four elements, all ingredients were basically in place for creation to unfold from its

⁵⁰ See *Tractatus* 3. 41–43, ed. Häring, 556: 'But wherever Genesis says GOD SAID etc. there it denotes the formal cause which is the wisdom of God, because the speaking of the creator himself is nothing other than that he disposes the form of a future thing in the wisdom that is coeternal with himself.'

⁵¹ See *Tractatus* 3. 47–49, ed. Häring, 556: 'For the creator's seeing that something is good is nothing other than that what he has created pleases him in the same (spirit of) benignity out of which he created.' To underscore the relation between loving and seeing Thierry uses the proverb: *Ubi amor est ibi oculus*. The same proverb is cited by William of Conches in *Dragmaticon* I.5.6, ed. Ronca, CCCM 152: 19.

⁵² Thierry sums up his conclusion in 3. 54–56, ed. Häring, 556–57: 'For the Father is the efficient cause, the Son the formal cause, the Holy Spirit the final cause and the four elements the material cause. And from these four causes universal corporeal substance has its existence'.

⁵³ Cf. chs. 2, 3, 5 and 18. Note also how in *Tractatus* 3. 50–54, ed. Häring, 556, Thierry contrasts matter with the whole Trinity before he comments on the contributions of the divine persons: 'In matter therefore, i.e., the four elements, the whole Trinity is actively engaged, namely by creating matter insofar as it is the efficient cause; by forming and ordering created matter insofar as it is the formal cause; and by loving and governing formed and ordered matter insofar as it is the final cause'.

central principles. Thierry appears to break rank with the tradition of Augustinian Genesis interpretations by explaining the creation and formation of the world not so much as dependent on a single divine act,⁵⁴ but rather as a gradual development from secondary causes, an innovation probably introduced by Bernard of Chartres, who may have been his older brother.⁵⁵ For Thierry, through a series of physical causes the generation of one thing leads naturally to another, just as the first day in Genesis brought on the next. The first 'day' or what Thierry calls the first integral revolution of heaven,⁵⁶ was the day on which God created not only matter (cf. the four material elements) but also light. Thierry attributes the origin of light to the activity of its physical source, i.e., fire. He does so by explaining how, due to the heavenly revolution of the first day, fire as the highest material element began to warm the highest part of the lowest element, air.⁵⁷ Since brightness is a natural characteristic of fire, the heat of fire also began to illumine the air, thereby generating

⁵⁴ For the relative positions on creation of the Chartrians Thierry and William of Conches as well as of Hugh of St. Victor, see Charlotte Gross, 'Twelfth-Century Concepts of Time: Three Reinterpretations of Augustine's Doctrine of Creation *Simul*,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23 (1985): 325–338. To elucidate Augustine's position on time and creation Gross cites *De Genesi ad litteram* I.15: 'Not that unformed matter precedes formed things in time, for everything is created together at the same time (*utrumque simul concreatum*, cf. Ecclus. 18:1) . . . indeed, God created matter formed.' Augustine compares God's creation of formed matter in this passage with human speech. Just as one emits the sound (*vox*) and the specific pronouncement of a word (*verbum*) simultaneously, so God created matter and form together (p. 330 n. 16). Against this Augustinian background Gross sees as the innovation of the Chartrians that they view time as the duration of cosmic disposition, whereas for Hugh time is a sequence of historical events ordained by God and effected for humanity's restoration (p. 327).

⁵⁵ Bernard's so-called use of the *formae natae* as mediating between the absolute ideas and matter is well known, see Bernard of Chartres, *Glosae super Platonem*, edited with an introduction by Paul E. Dutton (Toronto, 1991), 70–96. Parent sees Bernard of Chartres following an Eriugenian trend in situating the Platonic Ideas hierarchically below God, instead of positioning them above the Demiurge as in the *Timaeus*. Whereas in Bernard the ideas are not co-eternal with the Trinity, Eriugena's primordial causes are located in the divine Word, with whom they are co-eternal. Adopting the notion of the ideas as responsible for endowing creation with form, Thierry appears to have reduced them to the simplicity of one divine form in God, while the determination of the forms is left to the Word as the formal exemplary cause of the universe. Hence his distinction between the Father as *unitas* and the Son as *aequalitas unitatis* in chs. 37 to 47. See Parent, *La doctrine de la création dans l'école de Chartres*, 46–47 (on Bernard) and 54–58 (on Thierry).

⁵⁶ See *Tractatus* 4. 58–59, ed. Häring, 557: *Dies naturalis est spacium in quo una celi integra conuersio ab ortu ad ortum perficitur*.

⁵⁷ See *Tractatus* 6. 73–74.

light. He goes on to explain how the second day witnesses the genesis of the firmament. Having caused light through the illumination of air, the heat of the fire began to warm the water next. As a result, the water surface started to evaporate and ascended into the air,⁵⁸ where it turned into clouds. When Genesis says about the second day: 'and God put the firmament in the middle of the waters' (*et posuit firmamentum in medio aquarum*), it represents the physical process of the air settling in neatly between the evaporated waters and those that remained below.⁵⁹

Due to these and other physical explanations, Thierry's treatise became a veritable Chartrian showpiece. Its achievement to withdraw cosmology from the realm of the miraculous and to win for physical theory a relative independence from theology has especially been hailed.⁶⁰ It is important, however, not to mistake Thierry for a deist *avant la lettre* by making clear that his physical explanations at no point transcend the level of textual interpretation.⁶¹ As is apparent from the preface of his work, Thierry approached the Genesis-text just as he would have any other text he might have taught in school, such as Vergil or Plato, by commenting on the intention of the author and the usefulness of the work.⁶² In his view, Moses, traditionally held to be its author, wrote the book of Genesis in order to demonstrate that one single God accomplished both the creation

⁵⁸ See *Tractatus* 7. 85–87, ed. Häring, 558: 'But when the air had been illumined by the power of the higher element, it followed naturally that through the mediation of the air's illumination fire began to warm the third element, i.e., water, and through this heating process suspended it in condensed form above the air'.

⁵⁹ See *Tractatus* 8. 4–6, ed. Häring, 558: 'And at that point the air was aptly called firmament as if firmly supporting the higher water and containing the lower water, while it separated the one intransgressably from the other'.

⁶⁰ This is the judgment of Raymond Klibansky, 'The School of Chartres,' *Twelfth-Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Society*, ed. by M. Clagett, G. Post and R. Reynolds (Madison, 1961), 8. In his sparse comments on Thierry, Southern also emphasizes Thierry's clarity as something Chartrian masters had in common with Parisian ones, without commenting on his actual views on creation, see *Scholastic Humanism* Vol. II, 82–84.

⁶¹ Gross points to the ambiguity of Thierry's position, as she observes contradictions between his literal and his physical exegesis. This problem becomes less acute, however, if one accepts the approximative character of Thierry's interpretation. See Gross, 'Twelfth-Century Concepts of Time,' 331 and Dronke, 'Thierry of Chartres,' 365.

⁶² Hinting at a similar point, Wetherbee observes that Thierry's desire to read Genesis *secundam physicam* is ultimately motivated by the concern to reconcile ancient *auctores* (*Timaeus*) with Patristic (and one might add: scriptural) tradition. See Wetherbee, 'Philosophy, cosmology and the twelfth-century renaissance,' 28.

of the world and the generation of humanity. This God we all owe worship. In line with Romans 1:20, therefore, he sees the usefulness of Moses' book in that it teaches knowledge of God from his works.⁶³

In light of Thierry's stated purpose, i.e., to acquire knowledge of God, his physical explanations are in the end only of instrumental, or rather 'integumental' value, to the extent that they bring him closer to his goal. Yet the knowledge of God, once gained, will no doubt supersede the laws of physics, just as it will also transcend the letter of Scripture, which thus betrays a similar intermediate function. It is precisely because Thierry regards Scripture as an integumental text that he can compare it to other texts, whose words may likewise be a wrapping of divine truth. Thus he can draw parallels between the creation account of Scripture and the creation myth of Plato's *Timaeus*. Describing the function of the creative spirit in Gen. 1:2 as 'the operative power of the Maker' (*virtus artificis et operatrix*) which is innate in creation, he likens it to Plato's World Soul.⁶⁴ In yet another Platonic analogy, he identifies the four elements as 'unformed matter' (*materia informis*), whereby he explains that their 'unformed-ness' (*informitas*) resembles a kind of 'uniform-ness' (*uniformitas*) here. After all, since chaos rationally precedes order, it must be inferred that prior to the unfolding of creation the individual characteristics of the elements were barely distinguishable.⁶⁵

⁶³ Thierry's comments in *Tractatus* 1. 7–10 fit the standard pattern of the so-called *accessus ad auctores* at the beginning of literary treatises. For an analysis of the medieval *accessus* and various examples, see A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott (eds), *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100–c. 1375. The Commentary-Tradition* (1988; rev. ed. Oxford, 1991), ch. 1. See also A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship. Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (1984; Philadelphia, 1988), chs. 1 and 2.

⁶⁴ See *Tractatus* 25. 29–31, ed. Häring, 566. Commenting on Gen. 1:2 Thierry sees the spirit of the Lord which hovers above the waters as arranging the material elements: 'For because matter itself is by itself without form, it can in no way receive a form other than from the operating power of the artificer which orders it. The philosophers have called this power by different names'. One of these philosophical names is spirit. In 27. 44, ed. Häring, 566, Thierry draws a Platonic analogy between the spirit of creation and the World Soul: *Plato uero in Timeo eundem spiritum mundi animam uocat*. In 27. 52, ed. Häring, 567, he next draws an analogy with the Holy Spirit: *Christiani uero illud idem Spiritum sanctum appellant*. According to Maccagnolo, however, Thierry does not directly identify the World Soul as Holy Spirit here, but refers instead to the *virtus artificis*, i.e., the spirit of Gen. 1:2. See Maccagnolo, *Rerum universitas*, 210–212. See also n. 43 above.

⁶⁵ See *Tractatus* 24. 12–16, ed. Häring, 565: 'The unformedness of those elements consists in the fact that every one of them is almost identical to the next. And because a minimal difference or almost nothing stood between them, the philoso-

Rather than from its physical content, the success of Thierry's treatise seems to derive ultimately from its overall framework. In it natural and scriptural text function as interdependent but provisional paradigms of a divine truth that transcends both. Due to Thierry's skillful elaboration of his project, its orthodoxy was never in doubt. But then one might seriously question whether its parabolic nature was truly appreciated.⁶⁶

B. 2. *Exegetical Nature-poetry in Alan of Lille (ca. 1120–1203)*

As stated above, soon after Thierry comparisons between the World Soul and the Holy Spirit were no longer deemed appropriate. While the World-Soul controversy reflects on the one hand the competitive nature of twelfth-century theology, it also indicates a growing difficulty on the part of the Chartrians to keep Nature and Scripture connected through a transparent use of *integumentum*. To illustrate this difficulty and explain how it encroached on the holy alliance between Nature and Scripture, to the point even of driving them apart, I shall turn to Alan of Lille's *Plaint of Nature*, an integumental poem written in Chartrian vein.⁶⁷

Compared to Thierry, Alan's work represents a further stage of Chartrian development. The idea of secondary causes has here given rise to a personification of Nature into a full-blown goddess, who mediates between sublunar humans and transcendent creator.⁶⁸ Notwithstanding noticeable literary influences on Alan's goddess, the

phers regarded that difference as nothing and labeled the confusion of these elements one unformed matter'.

⁶⁶ It seems questionable indeed that this was the case. If his contemporaries conferred criticism on Thierry, it apparently concerned the general tendency to transform biblical books into treatises on cosmology. See N.M. Häring, 'Commentary and Hermeneutics,' in: R.L. Benson and G. Constable (eds.), *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (1982; Toronto, 1991), 382. For a modern echo of this medieval criticism, see B. Stock, *Myth and Science*, 240: 'Instead of following the traditional method of fitting natural philosophy into the historical framework of the Bible, it fits the opening chapters of Genesis into the framework of natural philosophy'.

⁶⁷ For the text of Alan's *Plaint*, see N.M. Häring (ed.), 'Alan of Lille. *De Planctu naturae*,' *Studi medievali* 3a serie 19 (1978): 797–879. References are given to chapter and line numbers. In what follows I cite from the translation by James J. Sheridan, *Alan of Lille. The Plaint of Nature. Translation and Commentary* (Toronto, 1980).

⁶⁸ For a survey of this development, see George D. Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, 1972). I have been unable to consult the new edition of Economou's book. See also Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses. Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2003), 51–89.

Chartrian background does not only color her ornate description, but may also give us insight into the particular nature of her plaintive demeanor, as Alan attempts to keep the elaborate scheme of the Chartrian universe under close wraps. Whereas Thierry's study of nature by means of a physical exegesis of Genesis made him content to focus on the causes of nature and not its effects,⁶⁹ in alternate fashion Alan's poem explores the consequences of Nature's universal reign.

When dealing with nature's unfolding from its causes, Thierry had mentioned the creation of humanity in the image and likeness of God, but he never pursued the point, ranking humans simply among the *animalia terrae*.⁷⁰ More importantly, throughout his exegetical treatise he did not touch on the fall and humanity's expulsion from paradise in the aftermath of human sin. It is that untold other half of Scripture's creation story that appears to motivate Alan's poem.⁷¹ For Alan, the study of Nature as a way to find knowledge about God cannot be complete until one is made aware of the inadequacy that taints all human efforts, including the attempt to gain knowledge of God. This inadequacy, which has its deeper roots in the biblical story of the fall, had remained implicit in Thierry's recourse

⁶⁹ Interpreting God's rest on the sabbath, Thierry states his position clearly in *Tractatus* 16. 93–95, ed. Häring, 561: 'Everything that is born or created after those six days is not instituted by a new mode of creation but receives its substance in one of the aforesaid modes'.

⁷⁰ Thierry explains how on the fifth day the warmth of the stars reaches the waters and creates fish and birds. See *Tractatus* 14. 79–82, ed. Häring, 561, for Thierry's description of the sixth day: 'That life-giving warmth, transmitted by moisture, naturally reaches down to the earthly level and thereupon the earthly animals are created. Among their number the human is made in God's image and according to his likeness. And the space of this sixth revolution is called the sixth day'.

⁷¹ In his *accessus* Thierry compares Genesis as the book about the birth of creation with Matthew as the book about the birth of Christ. Thus he appears to distinguish the work of creation (*opus creationis*) from that of restoration through Christ (*opus restorationis*), just as Hugh of St. Victor does in *De sacramentis*. See Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis*, Prol. 2, PL 176: 183A: *Duo enim sunt opera in quibus universa continentur quae facta sunt. Primum est opus conditionis. Secundum est opus restorationis. Opus conditionis est quo factum est, ut essent quae non erant. Opus restorationis est quo factum est ut melius essent quae perierant* ('There are two works in which all created reality is found contained. The first is the work of creation, the second is the work of restoration. The work of creation is that whereby those things that were not came into being. The work of restoration is that whereby those things that had been impaired became better'). Still, the *Tractatus* does not deal with humanity's fall, much less so with its restoration.

to Nature and Scripture as paradigms. Staying much closer to this other side of Genesis' creation story, Alan reveals a more pronounced pessimism about human nature. More surprisingly perhaps, especially in light of the twelfth century's celebrated natural symbolism, he also displays what seems to be an un-Chartrian *tristesse* about Nature itself.

In a moving portrait Alan's prosimetric *Plaint of Nature* depicts how the young goddess Nature suffered a most tragic fate. He tells us how she had to endure repeated physical and sexual assaults from her human subjects, which he has visualized in the tears on her face.⁷² Those insults have finally reached the point where she decides to come down from heaven to take action against humanity. When she arrives in the sublunar world, creation salutes her by erupting in spontaneous bloom. But the poet who witnesses all this fails to recognize her, even though he has just voiced an eloquent lament about the contemporary barbarisms defiling Nature, which serves as the proem to Alan's *Plaint*. When seeing the maiden's beauty suddenly up close, he falls in a trance only to come to life after she kisses him on the lips.⁷³ When he asks about her identity, she tells him the story from her perspective. She is Lady Nature, who God had put in charge after the creation of the world as his right hand (*Dei auctoris vicaria*).⁷⁴ It was her explicit task to maintain the stability of creation's natural order by supervising procreation, pairing like with like.⁷⁵ After remanding part of her responsibility to

⁷² See *De planctu naturae* II. 35–39, ed. Häring, 809–10; trans. Sheridan, 75–76: 'Great though the delight of her beauty was, tears inexplicably sought to wipe out the beauty of her smile. For tears, flowing stealthily from the well of her eyes, gave notice of the throb of internal pain. Moreover, the face itself, turned towards the ground in chaste modesty, bespoke an injury done the maiden in some form or other.' See also *De planctu* VII. 45–48.

⁷³ See *De planctu naturae* VI. 4–10, ed. Häring, 824–25; trans. Sheridan, 116: 'When I saw this kinswoman of mine close at hand, I fell upon my face and stricken with mental stupor, I fainted; completely buried in the delirium of a trance, with the powers of my senses impeded, I was neither alive nor dead and being neither, was afflicted with a state between the two. The maiden, kindly raising me up, strengthened my reeling feet with the comforting aid of her sustaining hands. Entwining me in an embrace and sweetening my lips with chaste kisses, she cured me of my illness of stupor by the medicine of her honey-sweet discourse'.

⁷⁴ See *De planctu naturae* VI. 21; see further VIII. 224.

⁷⁵ See *De planctu naturae* VIII. 217–223, ed. Häring, 840; trans. Sheridan, 145: 'When the artisan of the universe had clothed all things in the outward aspect befitting their natures and had wed them to one another in the relationship of lawful marriage. . . . He decreed that by the lawful path of derivation by propagation, like things, sealed with the stamp of manifest resemblance, should be produced from like'.

Venus,⁷⁶ however, this goddess of love betrayed her by engaging in an adulterous liaison and abandoning her given task of pairing like with like. Venus' illicit actions spread rapidly, thereby not only disrupting the natural order of creation, but causing Lady Nature great agony. This is why she was forced to come down now from heaven in person. Since humanity, the highest creature, ardently persists in following Venus' lewd example, Nature wants to confer with the poet about what to do with those humans who keep defiling her laws by engaging in adultery, homosexuality or other so-called barbaric activities.⁷⁷ She considers a number of solutions that all involve the help of various other gods, and finally decides to ask Genius to excommunicate those humans who do not mend their ways.⁷⁸ After

⁷⁶ It has remained an unsolved riddle why Nature needed a delegate. Nature herself touches on this point only obliquely, see *De planctu naturae* VIII. 235–41, ed. Häring, 840–41; trans. Sheridan, 146: 'But because without the supporting skill of a sub-delegated artisan, I could not put the finishing touches on so many species of things and because I decided to spend my time in the delightful palace of the ethereal region, . . . I stationed Venus, learned in the artisan's skill, on the outskirts of the Universe to be the subdelegate in charge of my work. . . .'

⁷⁷ See *De planctu naturae* VIII. 101–07, ed. Häring, 836; trans. Sheridan, 137–38: 'For this reason, then, did I leave the secret abode of the kingdom in the heavens above and come down to this transitory and sinking world so that I might lodge with you, as my intimate and confidant, my plaintive lament for the accursed excesses of man, and might decide, in consultation with you, what kind of penalty should answer such an array of crimes so that a conformable punishment, meting out like for like, might repay in kind the biting pain inflicted by the above-mentioned misdeeds.' It is important to note that Alan's sexual condemnations function as a kind of code-language to uncover a much broader notion of vice which represents cultural and intellectual decline. See on this Jan Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex. The Meaning of Grammar to a Twelfth-Century Intellectual* (Cambridge, 1985), 39–49. In the final chapter on Alan we will discuss the recent more ambiguous reading advocated by Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago, 1997), 67–91.

⁷⁸ For Nature's letter of request to Genius who seems to act as her priest, see *De planctu naturae* XVI. 187–213, esp. 208–13, ed. Häring, 871–72; trans. Sheridan, 207–08: 'Since, then, our interests are being damaged by a common attack, sweetening you with prayers, laying injunctions on you by virtue of your obligation of obedience, mingling admonitions with orders and orders with admonitions, I urge that, laying aside every specious excuse, you make haste to come to us so that you, with the ready help of myself and my maidens, may remove the sons of abomination from participation in the sacred rites of our church and may, with due solemnity of office, strike them with the punitive rod of excommunication.' Rather than demonstrating merely the power of the institutionalized church, the use of *virga* here could be a subtle allusion to Nature's prophetic function, as Alan plays on the biblical affinity between the terms *virgo* and *virga* found in Num. 17:8 (Aaron's rod) and Isa. 11:1. Hildegard of Bingen uses the same pair to describe the incar-

he has complied with her request, the poet suddenly wakes up from what in retrospect seems to have been a mere vision.⁷⁹

Alan's charges that humanity bears chief responsibility for the disruption of creation's natural order should cause no real surprise. As said, he is only more truthful to the scriptural narrative of creation here, which Genesis follows up with that of humanity's fall and its expulsion from paradise. Taking the Chartrian universe of a parallel micro- and macrocosmos seriously, Alan rightly infers that humanity's sinful act does not just hurt its own destiny, but threatens to subvert the harmony of the entire universe. One of the most arresting images in the *Plaint* illustrating this is that of the famous tear in the garment of Lady Nature. While Alan has taken great pains to depict Nature's regal outfit in minute detail, beautifully visualizing the ornate splendor of creation, precisely on the spot where we expect to see the portrait of humanity we find Nature's dress revealing instead an ugly tear. In one single *integumentum*, epitomizing at the same time his own remarkable ability to create multi-functional images, we not only see Nature defiled and deplored, but we also realize how humanity's insults to its protectress forebode imminent self-destruction.⁸⁰

Alan's poetic account of Nature's universal reign is thus clearly a more pessimistic one than Thierry's ideal abstraction of creation's physical causes. So far, however, he merely takes a traditional scriptural

nation to Mary, see B. Newman, *Sister of Wisdom. St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley, 1987), 162, 192.

⁷⁹ See *De planctu naturae* XVIII. 164–65, ed. Häring, 879; trans. Sheridan, 221: 'Accordingly, when the mirror with these images and visions was withdrawn, I awoke from my dream and ecstasy and the previous vision of the mystic apparition left me'.

⁸⁰ See *De planctu naturae* VIII. 164–72, ed. Häring, 838; trans. Sheridan, 142–43, where Nature explains the meaning of this tear to the poet: 'Then she said: "From what you have already sampled you can deduce what is the symbolic signification of the representation of the parenthesis-like rent. For since, as we have said before, many men arm themselves with vices to injure their own mother and establish between her and them the chaos of ultimate dissension, in their violence they lay violent hands on me, tear my clothes in shreds to have pieces for themselves and, as far as in them lies, compel me, whom they should clothe in honour and reverence, to be stripped of my clothes and to go like a harlot to a brothel. This is the hidden meaning symbolised by this rent—that the vesture of my modesty suffers the insults of being torn off by injuries and insults from man alone"'. The tear in Nature's garment is an obvious reference to the torn dress of Lady Philosophy in Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*.

course here, as the early medieval exegetical tradition of Genesis was accustomed to include this less flattering episode of the fall.⁸¹ It is not until he sets out to restore the virgin-like splendor of creation that the voice of the endangered Lady Nature begins to drown out that of traditional exegesis to the point where the original parallelism of Nature and Scripture is no longer recognized. For instead of following traditional exegetical norms, regarding humanity and the cosmos as jointly depending on the mediation of Christ for their redemption, Alan inserts the scriptural story of fall and redemption into the sophisticated framework of his self-chosen mythological plot.

In Alan's poetic retelling of the scriptural narrative, Lady Nature, who had been personally injured in humanity's attacks, decides to take the matter of creation's reform daringly into her own hands. As she encounters little difficulty in gaining the poet's sympathy for her tragic plight, she can henceforth count on his unquestionable loyalty to help her decide on a cure.⁸² She ultimately launches the drastic measure of threatening those humans who do not repent with excommunication.⁸³ While Alan's solution to remedy the ongoing human attacks on Nature by making her seek refuge with the trusting poet (who may or may not be identical with the poet of the *Plaint* itself) makes for a riveting plot, its enclosure in integumental form obfuscates the exegetical message which his solution simultaneously sends. In Alan's poem we lack the transparency by which the story of Nature can simply be interchanged with that of Scripture, as in Thierry, where both were paradigms that could help one find knowledge about God. Targeting humanity's sinfulness as the single

⁸¹ On Augustine's commentary on the fall of humanity, see *De Genesi ad litteram* XI.30–42, ed. Zycha, CSEL 28.1: 362–378. For Eriugena's commentary on the same topic, see *Periphyseon* IV.830C–V.865C, CCCM 164: 126–165: 9. For Abelard's position on the fall, see his *Expositio in Hexaemeron*, PL 178: 776A–784A.

⁸² See n. 77 above. That Nature is successful in getting the poet on her side is evident when the poet delicately phrases his next question about the rent in her dress as a lament rather than a direct question (VIII. 158: *a te vellem quiddam conquerendo querere, non querendo*).

⁸³ Apparently, her threat lacked persuasion, for at the beginning of the *Anticlaudianus* (ca. 1182–1183), Alan's popular sequel to the *Plaint*, we find Nature engulfed by a sense of complete failure. Considering her creation of humanity now as a project beyond salvation, she calls upon her sisters, the liberal arts, to fashion a New Man (*Novus homo*).

cause of Nature's defamation, Alan's integumental *Plaint* redirects traditional modes of exegesis, in which redemption is dependent on Christ's atonement, by inserting a new exegetical option. In this new Chartrian exegesis, only when Nature and humanity as parallel macro- and microcosm turn to each other for comfort and consolation, thus becoming truly integrated, can they both benefit from Christ's redemption. Alan's model offers a significant departure from traditional scriptural interpretation, and a remarkably innovative one at that, in that even Christ's mediation cannot become effective before this integration of human and universal nature is truly reached.⁸⁴

Due to the seductive allure of Nature's plight, however, the exegetical implications of Alan's poem are barely audible. As the sympathy for Lady Nature gains prominence with the poet and his audience, it seems its exegetical message recedes more and more into the background. After Alan, it appears the affinity between Nature and Scripture will never be the same. Following the success of his integumental poetry, Nature continues to tell her own story with increasing success, as she switches to the vernacular, and an ever-growing audience.⁸⁵ But the exegetical message she simultaneously proclaimed is henceforth met with silence. While in the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas, due to his mastery of the new Aristotelian framework, was able to prevent the separation of Nature and Grace from becoming definitive just yet, this analysis of Thierry's and Alan's views on creation suggests that the underlying ties between Nature and Scripture had already started to unravel, setting the later disjunction of Nature and Grace in unstoppable motion.

⁸⁴ As we saw above in ch. 1.VII, pp. 42–44, Evans interpreted Alan's *novus homo* as an *alter Christus*. Thus she regards the initiative of Nature and the liberal arts to create a New Man as a sign of Alan's faith in education as the road to human perfection. See her *Alan of Lille. The Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1983), 150. If one accepts my interpretation, according to which human and universal nature need to strengthen one another before they can jointly be redeemed in Christ, one does better to see Alan's *novus homo* as an *alter Adam*. For his perfectibility the New Man relies on education only insofar as the aid of pedagogy allows him to reintegrate with the surrounding natural universe. Whatever state of perfection the New Man may reach, it still represents only a first step towards Christ's redemption rather than an alternative to it.

⁸⁵ The influence of Alan's poetry on vernacular poetry, such as Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, is well known, see Newman, *God and the Goddesses*, 97–111.

IV Conclusion

When Dupré cited Alan's famous stanza, it was not made clear that this stanza is taken from a longer poem, which a thirteenth-century editor gave the telling title *Magister Alanus de miseria mundi*.⁸⁶ Rather than offering a sacramental view of nature, Alan's poem seems to put forth an unredeemed view of both nature and humanity. Thus he proclaims a similar Chartrian message here. As we have seen, this message is about the interdependence of humanity and the cosmos in their need to rely on each other as a precondition even to receiving Christ's redemption. He does so in a more explicitly scriptural fashion here than in the *Plaint*, as he elaborates a theme from Ps. 102:15 (Vg.), where the days of humanity are compared to the ephemeral and fragile existence of grass: *Homo sicut foenum eius dies; Tanquam flos agri sic efflorescit*.⁸⁷ And again we hear a voice which, though sensitive to the precious bloom of nature, is deeply ominous about the consequences of a strictly natural life. The poem contains numerous references to the role of death,⁸⁸ for example, as both humanity and nature will surely perish without the sacramental effect of Christ's atonement.

Just as the scriptural side of Alan's integumental nature poetry was rarely heard after the twelfth century, so the various methods of exegesis that came into being after the Middle Ages gave little attention to the natural side of Scripture. As the bond with nature declined, so the exegetical theme of human salvation, as opposed to a natural or cosmic one, became more and more prominent. Rather than attributing the demise of this affinity between Nature and Scripture to the development of either cosmology or exegesis, it seems the twelfth century witnessed instead the disintegration of what was once the very condition for their age-long affinity: a rhetorical framework of interpretation. The transparency of Nature and Scripture in this framework rested ultimately on the flexibility with which the

⁸⁶ See M.-Th. d'Alverny, *Alain de Lille. Textes inédits avec une introduction sur sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris, 1965), 40.

⁸⁷ 'Humanity, its days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so shall it flourish'. Cf. also Isa. 40:7-8 and Jam. 1:11.

⁸⁸ See the appendix to this chapter for the full text and a translation of Alan's poem. See especially the poem's fifth and middle stanza.

interpreting mind could transcend its own findings by connecting Scripture not only to Nature but both collectively to a higher goal, whether one calls this knowledge of a transcendent God or simply the interpretation of reality.

It is the very fact that the line between these two options is ultimately a blurred one that appears to give the Chartrian texts their peculiar ethereal quality, as in the skilled hands of poets like Alan and before him Bernard Silvestris creation seems to take on divine luster. Perhaps we should resist being seduced by the eloquent story of nature too much, though, for the claims put forth by Alan and other authors went much further than a desire to be acknowledged as good poets. As we have seen in Thierry, himself not a poet but an expositor and commentator, their aim was to promote a world view which, while being generally responsible in terms of Christian culture, was at the same time up-to-date on the latest scientific developments. The integration of natural science on the one hand and literary talent and skills on the other, like that of Nature and Scripture, presents thus another nodal point in the tapestry of the twelfth-century renaissance made up of such variegated intellectual strands. How art and science were reconciled will be seen in the next chapter, when we will comment on William of Conches. Known as the greatest grammarian of his age, according to his former student John of Salisbury, he was also the age's most profound philosopher of nature. In good Chartrian fashion, moreover, these two interests of his seemed only to reinforce each other, as he set out on a lifelong quest to uncover the structure of the universe.

APPENDIX: ALAN OF LILLE'S POEM *DE MISERIA MUNDI*

For the full Latin text, see *Ein Jahrtausend Lateinischer Hymnendichtung*, edited by Guido Maria Dreves and revised by Clemens Blume S.J. (Leipzig, 1909), vol. I: 288.

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| 1. Omnis mundi creatura
Quasi liber et pictura
Nobis est in speculum,
Nostrae vitae, nostrae sortis,
Nostrī status, nostrae mortis,
Fidele signaculum. | 1. The whole created world,
Like a book and a picture,
Serves us as a mirror,
Of our life, our fate,
our state, our death,
A trustworthy seal. |
| 2. Nostrum statum pingit rosa
Nostrī status decens glosa
Nostrae vitae lectio,
Quae dum primo mane floret,
Defloratus flos effloret
Vespertino senio. | 2. The rose paints our state,
A glittering gloss of our state,
A reading of our life;
While flourishing at the break
of dawn,
Deprived of its flower, it
fades away
In evening's decline. |
| 3. Ergo spirans flos expirat
In pallorem dum delirat
Oriundo moriens.
Simul vetus et novella,
Simul senex et puella
Rosa marcet oriens. | 3. Therefore, still full of life the
blossom expires
When it turns pale,
Dying by sprouting forth.
Both old and youngish,
Both elderly and girlish
The rose languishes as
soon as it comes up. |
| 4. Sic aetatis ver humanae
Iuventutis primo mane
Reflorescit paululum.
Mane tamen hoc excludit
Vitae vesper, dum concludit
Senii crepusculum. | 4. So the spring of human youth
At the break of dawn
flourishes briefly.
And yet the evening of life
chases away the morning,
while the dusk of decline
rounds it off. |

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| <p>5. Cuius decor dum perorat,
 Eius decus mox deflorat
 Aetas, in qua defluit,
 Fit flos foenum, gemma lutum,
 Homo cinis, dum tributum
 Huic morti tribuit.</p> | <p>5. With its blush ending,
 soon the age in which it
 progresses,
 takes away the bloom from
 its glory.
 Flower becomes hay, gem mud,
 Man⁸⁹ ashes, while he pays
 Dues to this death.</p> |
| <p>6. Cuius vita, cuius esse
 Poena, labor et necesse
 Vitam morte claudere;
 Sic mors vitam, risum luctus,
 Umbra diem, pontem fluctus,
 Mane claudit vespere.</p> | <p>6. His life, his existence
 Is nothing but affliction and
 labor, and
 Must therefore conclude
 with death;
 So death concludes life,
 mourning laughter,
 Shadows envelop the day,
 floods a bridge:
 Morning closes with evening.</p> |
| <p>7. In nos primum dat insultum
 Poena mortis gerens vultum,
 Labor, mortis histrio;
 Nos proponit in laborem,
 Nos assumit in dolorem,
 Mortis est conclusio.</p> | <p>7. Dealing us the first blow,
 Is affliction, bearing the
 likeness of death
 And labor, mimic of death;
 Rushing us to exertion,
 Receiving us in ever more pain:
 All ends in death.</p> |
| <p>8. Ergo clausum sub hac lege
 Statum tuum, homo, lege,
 Tuum esse respice,
 Quid fuisti nasciturus,
 Quid sis praesens, quid futurus,
 Diligenter inspice.</p> | <p>8. Therefore, read your state, man,
 Enclosed as it is under this law,
 Heed your existence,
 What you were at birth,
 What you are now, and will be,
 Inspect it closely.</p> |

⁸⁹ The Latin *homo* should be read as gender-neutral here, referring broadly to all human beings.

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| <p>9. Luge poenam, culpam plange,
Motus frena, fastum frange,
Pone supercilia;
Mentis rector et auriga,
Mentem rege, fluxus riga,
Ne fluant in devia.</p> | <p>9. Mourn your punishment,
lament your guilt,
Rein your movements,
shatter your pride,
Put down your arrogance;
Master and driver of the mind,
Rule your mind, tend your flows,
Lest, out of course, they
run dry.</p> |
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CHAPTER THREE

OPENING THE UNIVERSE: WILLIAM OF CONCHES AND THE ART OF SCIENCE

I *William of Conches: Philosopher or Heretic?*

Alongside Peter Abelard, the enigmatic twelfth-century author William of Conches (ca. 1085–1154) is considered one of the first true intellectuals of the Middle Ages. Being among the first medieval thinkers to try his hand at a purely rational explanation of things, more precisely, of the structure of the universe, he can indeed be regarded as having been a full-time professional philosopher.¹ Like Abelard, William was a professor who greatly impressed his students, which resulted in comments that express their unconditional admiration.² Born in Normandy at the end of the eleventh century, he probably started his long teaching career at the cathedral school of Chartres in the 1120s.³ Between 1144–1149 he can be found at the court of Geoffrey le Bel (or Plantagenet), Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou, where he composed his most famous and insightful work, the *Dragmaticon Philosophiae*.⁴ With Abelard, finally, William also shares

¹ See ch. 1: The Birth of the Intellectuals, esp. the role of Chartres in J. Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. T.L. Fagan (1957; Oxford, 1993), 48–61. On the career of William of Conches, see E. Jeaneau, *L'âge d'or des écoles de Chartres* (Chartres, 1995), 41–50.

² See John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon* I.5, ed. Hall, CCCM 98: 20. John calls him: *Willelmus de Conchis grammaticus post Bernardum Carnotensem opulentissimus*.

³ See E. Jeaneau (ed.), *Guillaume de Conches, Glosae super Platonem*. Textes Philosophiques du Moyen Age XIII (Paris, 1965), 10, and Jeaneau, *L'âge d'or des écoles de Chartres*, 43–44. We are not entirely sure that William actually taught at Chartres, but it seems more likely that he taught there than in Paris.

⁴ William's move from the cathedral school to the court was probably inspired by controversy, see Jeaneau, *L'âge d'or*, 44–45, and J. Cadden, 'Science and Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: The Natural Philosophy of William of Conches,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 1–24. The text of William's *Dragmaticon Philosophiae* was until recently best available in the edition by G. Gratarolus, *Dialogus de substantiis physicis*, published in Strasbourg in 1567, repr. Frankfurt 1967. In 1997 a new critical edition was published by I. Ronca (CCCM 152). Ronca also published a translation of this new Latin edition together with M. Curr: *William of Conches. A Dialogue on Natural Philosophy (Dragmaticon Philosophiae)* (Notre Dame, 1997). Both works are cited below.

the dubious honor of having been singled out for a vicious case of character assassination by William of St. Thierry,⁵ the academic spy to Bernard of Clairvaux. As is well known, Bernard was the religious leader not just of the Cistercians but of the entire twelfth-century world of Christian politics. Hence, the reason why this attack posed a real threat.

From a contemporary perspective, one can easily understand why modern historians such as Jacques Le Goff lavish enthusiastic praise on medieval intellectuals like Peter Abelard and William of Conches, as they seem to display an undiluted rationalism, a kind of secular intellectualism *avant la lettre*. From a medieval perspective, furthermore, it is also not too difficult to understand perhaps why Abelard's arrogant self-confidence, so manifest in the autobiographical account of his career, would make him a likely victim for those Christian leaders for whom religious piety was inseparably coupled with intellectual humility.⁶ But it is substantially more difficult to grasp why William of Conches became the focus of such unwelcome attention by William of St. Thierry. After all, one of the points that the latter criticized him for,—the unorthodox identification of Plato's World Soul in the *Timaeus* with the Christian Holy Spirit—, represents a position that about a decade later never raised any serious problems for his younger contemporary Thierry of Chartres. Thierry was even more prominently associated with the famous twelfth-century cathedral school of Chartres than William—hence his toponym—, as he was its chancellor between 1142 and 1150. One of the possible reasons why Thierry may have escaped criticism is that his equation of the World Soul with the third person of the Trinity occurred in a more responsible setting, namely in a commentary on the book of Genesis.⁷ In this respect Thierry's commentary stands in marked con-

⁵ For William of St. Thierry's criticism of Abelard and William of Conches as expressed in his letters to Bernard of Clairvaux, see J. Leclercq, 'Les lettres de Guillaume de Saint-Thierry à Saint Bernard,' *Revue Bénédictine* 79 (1969): 375–91.

⁶ Abelard was notorious for his extreme self-confidence, especially in his disputes with his masters William of Champeaux and Anselm of Laon, as is manifest also in his *Historia calamitatum*, *passim*. See ch. 4.I (The Incident: Talent *versus* Tradition) below.

⁷ See Thierry's *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* chs. 25–27, ed. Häring, 566–67, and my comments in ch. 2 above. On Thierry's overall career, see Dronke, 'Thierry of Chartres,' in: P. Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), 358–85, and Jeauneau, *L'âge d'or des écoles de Chartres*, 61–72.

trast with William's youthful *Philosophia*. For it is in this work, much more than in his later and more balanced *Dragmaticon Philosophiae*, that William plays up his own competence as a philosopher by setting it off against what he perceives to be the ignorance on the part of his colleagues.⁸

While the early Middle Ages had witnessed a remarkable experiment of independent, rational speculation about nature in Johannes Scottus Eriugena's *Periphyseon*,⁹ as was demonstrated in the first chapter, the unusual method propagated with such flair and tenacity by William of Conches yielded a far more fateful result. For it put him in an unflattering spotlight for his later attacker William of St. Thierry. It is William's method that this chapter wants to explore, therefore, as it confers a unique character on his writings. The effect of his method seems to have been that it opened up the universe—hence the title of this chapter—in two ways. Both of these will be featured in this chapter. First, it appears William can literally be credited with opening up the universe, in the sense that he expanded the horizon of natural science by developing an interest in even its tiniest parts, stretching its range into its most remote regions. All this will become clearer when we shall discuss his comments on the atoms as well as on the waters above the firmament. In contradistinction to William's reputable record as an important natural scientist, however, this chapter ultimately wants to shed light on his works from another perspective as well. It appears William's rational analysis of nature draws on a kind of literary and allegorical

Since Abelard's identification of the World Soul and the Holy Spirit was censured in 1140 at the council of Sens, Häring dates Thierry's treatise before 1140, yet based on internal textual evidence Dronke and others have since favored a later date. If this later date is to be accepted, it may well have been that the controversy had simply died down. Abelard's death and William's move to the court may have played a role in this. On the dating of the council of Sens, in 1141 rather than 1140, see chapter 4 n. 22.

⁸ William opens this work, formerly called *Philosophia mundi*, on a polemical note by accusing many 'masters who call themselves philosophers' of outright ignorance. Most of all, he sees them as unable to link *eloquentia* with *sapientia* after the example of Cicero. William's equation of the World Soul and the Holy Spirit is found in *Philosophia* I, III § 12–IV § 13, ed. Maurach (Pretoria, 1980), 22–23. For his specific definition of philosophy, see below n. 17.

⁹ Eriugena's *Periphyseon* is usually dated around 862–866. It contains a comprehensive philosophy of nature which was condemned in 1225, when it became associated with the heresy of Amalric of Bene. Pope Honorius III ordered that all extant copies be sent to Rome in order to be burnt.

subtlety that is almost the opposite of discursive argumentation and linear causality, based as it is on a sophisticated process of evocation and imagination. Approached from that angle, William belongs more in the company of his twelfth-century literary peers, such as Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille, than is made evident by the standard comparison with Adelard of Bath, whereby both are seen as foreboding thirteenth-century *scientia naturalis*.¹⁰ Seeing William as opening the universe in this latter, more comprehensive and more imaginative sense means that we shall have to become attuned to nature's poetic laws and its deepest rhythms, which William strove so hard to bring out. The combination of both aspects explains why the reading of his scientific writings is such an unusual experience, as they appear to represent in the end as much an artistic (i.e., a product of the literary arts) as a scientific accomplishment. As was aptly recognized by Peter Dronke, it is especially in his *Dragmaticon* that William found his own voice, successfully integrating form and content in a unique Platonic dialogue.

But let us come back for a moment to the two different views of William, noted above, as being on the one hand a true intellectual, a philosopher even, and on the other hand a formidable iconoclast, perhaps even a heretic. The difference between these two interpretations may ultimately be due to the effect of historical distance, inasmuch as the pursuit of rational inquiry has since the Enlightenment not just gained considerable acceptance and prestige, but has become ever more isolated from the worlds of faith, metaphor and the literary imagination. A helpful avenue in trying to overcome the alienating effects of this distance may be to try and pay more attention to the presence and importance of Plato in William's works. The reading of Plato appears to have been especially crucial for William because it awakened in him the enthusiasm and insight needed to combine the two very different strands of discourse that pervade his rhetoric: the compelling force of logic and rationality alongside the delicate technique of unveiling Platonic myth. While it is true that William's own age witnessed a growing divergence between these

¹⁰ In this respect my approach differs from that by A. Speer, *Die entdeckte Natur. Untersuchungen zu Begründungsversuchen einer 'scientia naturalis' im 12. Jahrhundert* (Leiden, 1995), 130–221 (ch. 4: Die dynamische Ordnung der natürlichen Welt) and is closer to Peter Dronke, *Fabula. Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden, 1974), 1.

two modes of argument, providing us with valuable background to understand his condemnation, the gap was just beginning to widen to become unbridgeable only by the thirteenth century.

Still, this chapter wants to do more than just analyzing why William favored this peculiar method, in which he combined scientific rationality and literary subtlety. It wants to analyze his unique contribution as a valuable comment on the culture of his age. This will bring us ultimately back to the issue of heresy, as we will try to uncover why his method, constructively and creatively designed, so it seems, as a way to lay bare nature's inner workings, became interpreted instead as undermining Christian doctrine. On the whole, this chapter shall focus on three different aspects of William's thought. First, we will bring out the pivotal role of Plato's *Timaeus* as freshly stimulating twelfth-century, especially Chartrian, speculation on the universe of nature. As I already indicated, it appears that as a role model for intellectuals, Plato was vitally important because he embodied a new and more systematic approach to the exploration of the universe. At the same time, however, his approach was also purposely self-reflexive. We will be particularly concerned with this last aspect of William's reception of Plato when analyzing the *Dragmaticon*. Second, we shall pay close attention to the literary, as distinguished but not separated from the scientific, dimensions of William's regard for and reception of Plato. After all, the texts of this pagan author had not just to be deconstructed but also reconstructed before they could in any way qualify as relevant and authoritative for the Christian intellectuals who populated twelfth-century France. In the chapter that follows we will find Abelard struggling with this same issue. Third and last, the chapter shall attempt to explain how William was able to fuse his scientific analysis with his literary interpretation so as to produce in the end a cosmology which was rationally sound as well as imaginatively alluring, even if not widely accepted.

While as an end product his cosmology was clearly independent of any authority—be it scriptural, patristic or even Platonic—, in the opinion of the present author (as obviously in William's own), it need not therefore be seen as contrary to Christian teaching.¹¹ Whether

¹¹ William states in *Philosophia* I, III § 12, ed. Maurach (Pretoria, 1980), 22: *Non enim quia scriptum non est, haeresis est, sed si contra fidem est* ('It is not heresy because it is not found in Scripture, but because it is against faith').

or not William of St. Thierry's negative judgment about his namesake was justified may in the end remain a matter of choice or 'opinion', to put it in Platonic terms. As a historical fact, however, it is irreversible and hence it seems of little interest to belabor this point. What the chapter wishes to make clear, however, is that by failing to take the variegated nature of William's methodology into account, William of St. Thierry's accusation seems representative for the paradigm shift that was soon to set in. Mistaking as he does the broad theologizing nature of his namesake's text for a limited, more scholastically oriented theological one, William of St. Thierry proves in retrospect an important witness to the change of atmosphere whereby the movement of twelfth-century humanism was eventually forced to disappear.

II *The Importance of Plato's Timaeus for William's Cosmology*

A. *The Lure of the Invisible*

Although Plato's *Timaeus* had been known throughout the early Middle Ages, it seems a new level of appreciation of both this work and its author was reached in the twelfth century, bringing the study of the *Timaeus* to new heights.¹² In line with this trend, it seems that somewhere in between the composition of his early *Philosophia* and his later *Dragmaticon*, William of Conches must have sat down to compose his *Glosae super Platonem*, which deal with precisely this Platonic treatise.¹³ The specific reason for its popularity was that the *Timaeus*, which was only partially known in the Middle Ages (until 53c) and inevitably read through the lens of its late antique translator and commentator Chalcidius,¹⁴ was well on its way to become this cen-

¹² See M. Gibson, 'The Study of the "Timaeus" in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries,' *Pensamento* 25 (1969): 183–94, reprinted in M. Gibson, *'Artes' and Bible in the Medieval West* (Aldershot, 1993).

¹³ For the place of his glosses on the *Timaeus* in William's entire oeuvre, see E. Jeaneau (ed.), *Guillaume de Conches. Glosae super Platonem* (Paris, 1965), 9–16. For a slightly amended chronology of William's work, see I. Ronca (ed.), *Dragmaticon*, CCCM 152: XIX–XII.

¹⁴ In his edition of the gloss, Jeaneau claims that William relies comparatively little on Chalcidius' commentary. See *Glosae super Platonem*, ed. Jeaneau, 27. Chalcidius

tury's primary resource for cosmological speculation. As William's *Glosae* explain it, while Plato's *Republic* had dealt with positive justice, it was the *Timaeus*, which concentrated on natural justice, that is, on the creation of the world. Hence this would be his central theme of discussion also.¹⁵ Given the twelfth century's deep-rooted interest in the natural world and its concomitant enthusiasm for the arts of the *quadrivium*—the long-neglected sciences of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy—,¹⁶ one can understand why the text of the *Timaeus* became the subject of such intense and enthusiastic scrutiny.

More specific to the case of William himself, it seemed the interest in the *Timaeus* flowed forth from a remarkable but coincidental coming together of different developments. In addition to the surge of interest in cosmological speculation, for which a debate on the *Timaeus* served as a perfect outlet, and in Plato's newly refreshed reputation as the most venerable of ancient philosophers, it was above all William's specific definition of philosophy that attracted him to the *Timaeus*. Apparently, the attraction of the *Timaeus* was so great that he saw this text as a more adequate source to guide him in his study of the universe than even its most sacred Christian counterpart: the book of Genesis. As we saw in the previous chapter, Genesis had still provided Thierry with his framework of interpretation. What then was William's changed sense of philosophy?

In his early work *Philosophia* William defined philosophy as 'the true comprehension of the things that are and are not seen and

is mentioned only five times. Recently, Thomas Ricklin has demonstrated that this may have been due to the fact that as archdeacon Chalcidius was seen as belonging to the same cultural sphere as his new commentators. See Th. Ricklin, 'Calcidius bei Bernhard von Chartres und Wilhelm von Conches,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 67 (2000): 119–41. On other, unacknowledged borrowing from Seneca's *Natural Questions*, see *Dragmaticon*, CCCM 152: XXIX–XXXII.

¹⁵ See *Glosae super Platonem* § III, ed. Jeuneau, 59 (*Accessus ad Timaeum*).

¹⁶ On natural speculation in the early twelfth century, see B. Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century. A Study of Bernard Silvestris* (Princeton, 1972) and his 'Science, Technology, and Economic Progress in the Early Middle Ages,' in: David C. Lindberg (ed.), *Science in the Middle Ages* (Chicago, 1978), 1–51. Cf. also T. Stiefel, *The Intellectual Revolution in Twelfth-Century Europe* (New York, 1985). See further the articles by W. Wetherbee ('Philosophy, cosmology, and the twelfth-century Renaissance'), T. Gregory ('The Platonic Inheritance') and Ch. Burnett ('Scientific speculations') in: P. Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, 21–53, 54–80, 151–76.

those that are and are seen'.¹⁷ This definition was not unique to William, as it goes back to the opening of Boethius' *De arithmetica*.¹⁸ But judging from William's case, it seems that in the twelfth century Boethius' words, perhaps mediated by Eriugena, were beginning to play into a new sensitivity. Propelled by the urge to grasp nature's underlying structure, William and other authors displayed a particular fascination with the attempt to understand its organic harmony. In this they came to associate true being, i.e., the true being of nature, specifically with the existence of things unseen. It is on this particular point, i.e., a thirst for an understanding of the things unseen, that the *Timaeus* provided the scholars of the twelfth century with a far more rewarding source than the biblical book of Genesis.

Whereas the *Timaeus* contains knowledge about such invisible entities as the World Soul, Genesis seems to touch on invisible reality only rarely. A notable exception is the account of the second day of creation, in which Genesis makes mention of the so-called waters above the firmament. It may well be for this reason, i.e., the interest in things unseen, that these waters became a source of great curiosity again for twelfth-century exegetes.¹⁹ Thus these unseen waters led Peter Abelard, who was never much of a natural scientist to begin with, to such desperation that he gave up on trying to define their usefulness altogether. They simply had no use at all. And since they were not useful, there is also no reason why God should be praised for them. According to Abelard's commentary on the so-called *Hexameron*, this is precisely why Moses chose not to include the typical closing phrase 'and God saw that it was good'

¹⁷ See *Philosophia* I, I § 4, ed. Maurach, 18: *Philosophia est eorum quae sunt et non videntur, et eorum quae sunt et videntur vera comprehensio*.

¹⁸ This definition is derived from Boethius, *De arithmetica* I, Proëmium, ed. Oosterhout and Schilling, CCSL 94A: 9: *Est enim sapientia rerum, quae sunt suique immutabilem substantiam sortiuntur, comprehensio ueritatis* ('For wisdom is the comprehension of the truth of the things that are and have an immutable substance') and 11: *Est enim sapientia earum rerum, quae uere sunt, cognitio et integra comprehensio* ('For wisdom is the knowledge and perfect comprehension of the things that truly are'). Cf. also Eriugena, *Periphyseon* I 441A, ed. Jeaneau, CCCM 161: 3, as discussed above in chapter 1.I (The Quest for Universal Nature), p. 11. William's definition of philosophy resembles Eriugena's definition of nature by reaching beyond the definition of that which is or is visible into non-being and non-visibility.

¹⁹ See H. Rodnite Lemay, 'Science and Theology at Chartres: the Case of the Supracelestial Waters,' *The British Journal for the History of Science* 10 (1977): 226–36.

when rounding off his description of the second day of creation.²⁰ Just as the words of logic reflect a careful arrangement of human affairs for Abelard, so God's words were intended to reflect how he arranged nature's affairs with care and precision. Abelard could not see how this was the case with the second day of creation. God must have noted his own lapse, so Abelard figured, which is why Moses did not write down his usual words of divine approval.

How different is the reaction of William of Conches, when compared to Abelard's dismissive statement! Far from arbitrarily assuming divine error, he took the very invisibility of the supracelestial waters as an incentive to inspect the laws of physical causality more closely. William likewise rejected the idea that these waters were frozen, as the venerable Bede had suggested in an earlier attempt to explain why they did not flow down and inundate the earth. For William's sharper scientific mind, Bede's solution was totally out of the question, as the firmament would certainly have collapsed under the weight of the ice. Instead he hypothesizes that we must dealing here with evaporated waters, in other words, with plain air.²¹ It is as if the very fact that the waters above the firmament were invisible seemed to have launched their case forward in the twelfth century's natural debate so as to capture the attention of William and others interested in explaining the workings of creation. But William did not stop at these waters. He appeared likewise interested in the movement of the planets or, what is even more unusual, in the possibility of human antipodes. While not directly accessible to human sense perception, all these entities proved a fascinating challenge to test out the limits of the human mind through calculation and speculation.

On a more structural level, it seems William's preference for things unseen was the driving force behind his modification of the theory of elements. In the traditional view dominant throughout the early Middle Ages the world's four constitutive elements, i.e., water, fire,

²⁰ See Peter Abelard, *Expositio in Hexaemeron*, ed. J.P. Migne, PL 178: 740A.

²¹ See *Philosophia* II, I–II, ed. Maurach, 41–44. William's discussion of the waters above the firmament derives from his larger discussion of the four elements, as the supracelestial waters are located in the region of the upper air or aether, which consists of fire. He rejects the literal interpretation of Gen. 1:7 that God separated the waters above the firmament from those below the firmament as *contra rationem*, see *Philosophia* II, I § 3.

earth and air, had been considered more or less identical with the visible elements so called. William was among the first scholars to make a clear distinction between the elements as invisible, physical principles underlying nature's functioning and the well-known visible qualities with which they had become associated. He seems to imply that, precisely because they are manifest, the visible elements cannot really be identical with the infinitesimal particles of which all reality is ultimately made.²² William therefore holds that visible water, air, fire and earth are more properly called *elementata* rather than *elementa*. Each visible element, so he explains, contains in fact a mixture of all four invisible elements, with one element dominating over the others. Thus visible earth contains the elements of water, air, fire and earth, and yet it appears to us as earth, because the element of earth prevails over the other elements. The *elementa* on the other hand, as distinguished from the *elementata*, have a much greater degree of purity, a purity that William once again associates quite naturally with their status of invisibility. Here we almost see the reverse of the pattern we saw before, as in the case of the waters above the firmament. For it appears that while the rationally abstract status of the elements facilitates their being understood, it seems at the same time to preclude their ever being perceived by ordinary human eyes.

The two issues mentioned above bring us closer to uncovering William's secret. For what is it that William stood to gain by incorporating Boethius' definition of philosophy into his own ('the comprehension of the things that are and are not seen and the things

²² See *Glosae super Platonem*, § LVIII–§ LX, ed. Jeaneau, 128–131. Rather than espousing an Epicurean position by supporting an atomistic conception of the universe, William embraces the definition of the *Pantegni* of Constantinus Africanus (d. 1087): *elementum est simpla et minima alicuius corporis particula, simpla ad qualitatem, minima ad quantitatem* ('the element is a simple and minimal particle of a certain body, simple as regards quality, minimal as regards size'). Constantine translated medical works from Arabic into Latin. Through Constantine William also appears to have undergone the influence of Galen. Cf. also *Philosophia* I, VII, ed. Maurach, 26–30 and *Dragmaticon* I.6.6, CCCM 152: 25. Since elements have a simple quality and minimal quantity, they are unlike atoms, because the elements differ from one another in quality. Cf. E.J. Dijksterhuis, *The Mechanization of the World Picture* (Oxford, 1961), 119–23. Just as in his physical theory William holds that there cannot be a contradiction in each of the elements (cf. *Glosae*, § LVIII: *pars simpla, cuius non sunt contrarie qualitates*), so his hermeneutical theory rules out that the various levels of interpretation of Plato's myth contradict each other.

that are and are seen'), while using the *Timaeus* as his preferred source for further analysis? In my opinion, the use of this definition enabled William to make progress in his systemic investigation of the universe on two counts. First, operating on the Platonic premise that unseen reality ranks higher in the hierarchy of nature than visible manifestation, William tended to consider non-visibility as a mystery inspiring him to search for a deeper truth. Second, since this deeper truth was naturally situated on the level of intelligibility rather than sense perception, knowledge of this truth could help to lay bare the workings of nature on the level of cause rather than effect.²³ In William's view, the only proper way for the scientist or philosopher to arrive at this level of higher truths was by abstracting from the visible effects to capture their invisible causes. Rather than seeing William as an experimental scientist, however, we should keep in mind what it is he ultimately wanted to achieve. His was not a secular and rational view of nature, but a keen eye for what made nature tick, for its subtle rhythms and casually fine-tuned organic processes. What is new and daring is that William thought he could indeed launch a successful artistic project in which all these different aspects could be integrated in a synthetic view of nature. It almost seems as if he wanted to recapitulate God's original act of creation intellectually by retracing his steps in reverse order, while maintaining the same high degree of creativity. This may also help to explain why he ended his *Philosophia* with the familiar saying that one goes from the cognition of the creature to that of the Creator, and why that is not just another platitude, as it captures the mood of this

²³ Applied to the theory of elements, this means that the *elementa* are seen as invisible causes, although they are created by God, while the *elementata* are seen as the effects of these causes rather than the product of direct divine creation. It is interesting to note that William does not assume any discontinuity between the levels of cause and effect in creation. Thus he rejects the view of some twelfth-century thinkers, whom he sees as misrepresenting Plato (*Timaeus* 30a and 43a), that God created the (invisible) elements first in random positions (*inordinata iactatio*), only thereafter to arrange them out of his goodness in a specific order. According to William God indeed assigned the lowest position to earth, but in doing so he merely built on its innate quality since, as the heaviest element, earth naturally tends to move downwards. He also assigned the highest position to fire, because fire reveals itself an upward motion. For William, therefore, God's creation operated through anticipation rather than remedial correction, for there never actually existed any kind of *inordinata iactatio* of elements. See *Philosophia* I, XI [De chao], ed. Maurach, 33–36 and *Glosae super Platonem*, § L–§ LIII, ed. Jeaneau, 118–123.

philosopher-*cum*-scientist quite accurately. Underneath the topical character of such a phrase, it remains true for William that the study of philosophy would eventually culminate in the study of the divine page or Scripture.²⁴ All things considered, knowledge of God was still the highest goal for this twelfth-century Christian-Platonic scientist.²⁵

B. *Macro- and Microcosm*

While the *Timaeus* contained ample information about visible things, its strength was clearly that it offered William an insight into invisible reality, an area of knowledge about which Genesis had mostly kept silent. Another point that fascinated William, thereby underlining the attraction of the *Timaeus*' cosmological otherness, was that in the *Timaeus* (29d–30d; 32c–34b) Plato explained how God, through the working of a Demiurge, had fashioned the world as a kind of living animal, endowing it even with a Soul. This presentation of unseen reality as a living organism endowed with reason and soul played into a typical Chartrian sensitivity which was to flourish in the twelfth century, namely the parallelism of micro- and macrocosm. This is the second count on which intimate knowledge of the *Timaeus* allowed William to make considerable progress in his own philosophical investigation. In describing the world as a living organism, the *Timaeus* supplied William with a model that gave the cosmology described in it a near-divine grandeur. But what may have been even more important is that it encouraged him to explore the humanist aspect of his conception of science even further. This 'humanist outlook' of his philosophy may well be one of the more striking and original features of William's nature project, as he took great care indeed to align his investigation of the universe with that of human nature. He finds the similarities between the make-up of

²⁴ See *Philosophia* IV, XXXIII § 58, ed. Maurach, 115–16. This seems to make William less the iconoclastic intellectual LeGoff may have had in mind.

²⁵ Yet this does not mean that William, as Southern suggests in commenting on his adaptation of his theory of the World Soul, 'had come to accept the weakest possible interpretation of Plato's words, in order to make them conform to orthodox Christian doctrine'. In addition, Southern's judgment that William regards the *Timaeus* as *supplementing* (my italics, WO) the truths of Revelation appears to overlook the basic parallelism between Nature and Scripture. See R.W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, Vol. II: The Heroic Age (Oxford, 2001), 77, 79.

the universe and that of humanity so striking that it is hard to over-see them. Both the universe and humans have a body made of four elements.²⁶ In addition, both have a soul. But their structural implications are even more important. Since it appears that the universe and humanity both consist of corporeal and incorporeal parts, of things seen and unseen so to speak, it is only when their body and soul become combined that they qualify as the proper subject-matter of philosophy for William. In this view, for which he totally depends on the *Timaeus*, the integration of body and soul is not just important for humans to be alive but also for the universe to function. After all, is not the universe alive too? More than anything else, therefore, it appears William wants to bring out the vitality and dynamism of human nature and of universal nature alike.

In exploring the analogy between the cosmos and the human person as that of an interrelation between macro- and microcosm, William does not hesitate to push their similarity of structure to its extreme. It is as if the interrelation borders on interdependence for him. Not only is it true that the body of the universe and the human body are made up of identical elements, which allows for the possibility of a detailed comparison, but even the pattern according to which they are arranged is identical. William calls this pattern conjunction (*conjunctio*). Following Plato, he holds that it is impossible to conjoin contrary elements without a medium, since this would destroy their harmony. Due to the three-dimensional proportions of the cosmos, furthermore, it appears there is need for two mediating elements rather than one. Hence, both air and water are needed in the middle to keep earth and fire from destroying each other, as is reflected in the exposition of *Timaeus* 32b.²⁷ It is no surprise that

²⁶ In *Glosae super Platonem* § LVIII, ed. Jeauneau, 128, William follows Constantine Africanus in connecting the four elements with the four fluids of the human body: *melancolia*, *flegma*, *sanguis* and *colera*. Just as the visible elements are made of all four invisible elements, so the four *humores* of the human body are also made of all four elements.

²⁷ See *Glosae super Platonem* § LX–§ LXI and § LXIV, ed. Jeauneau, 130–33 and 136–37. Cf. also *Philosophia* I, IX, ed. Maurach, 30–33. Following Chalcidius, William argues on the basis of the different characteristics of the elements here, as they either possess two qualities (e.g., fire is *calidus* and *siccus*, while earth is *frigida* and *sicca*) or consist of a combination of three properties (e.g., fire is *acutus*, *subtilis* and *mobilis*, whereas earth is *obtusa*, *corpulenta* and *immobilis*). William appears to resort to the last scheme to explain why two mediating elements are needed instead of one.

William sees the concept of *conjunctio* play a role of comparable significance in the human sphere. Faced with the question of how the human soul can dwell in the human person William replies: through conjunction' (*conjuncta*). He thereby rejects other alternatives such as *concreta*, *apposita* or *commixta*. They reveal unacceptable weaknesses to him, as in one way or another they all disregard the fact that body and soul are organically connected. Thus they fail to exclude the possibility that the soul be separated from the body, for example, in case the latter sustains an injury.²⁸

As with the connection between true reality and invisibility, William tries to capitalize on this analogy as yet another avenue leading him deeper into the secret recesses of nature's underlying structure. Thus he is eager to seize on the reciprocity between macrocosm and microcosm to explain certain problem areas inside each. In doing so, he does not hesitate to cross from one realm to another, as he apparently does not fear a contamination of the discussion. He frequently resorts to explanations in the sphere of human living to find answers for what are in fact larger cosmological questions, and *vice versa*. In an attempt to explain why the stars are made in fire, and not in air, for example, he points out that the element of fire is naturally dry, as opposed to air, which contains humidity. It is the presence of humidity which allows a body to thicken, just as potter's clay begins to thicken when put over fire. Obviously this makes it impossible for stars to be made in air.²⁹

As a counterexample it is interesting to see how William analyzes the psychological characteristics that typify each stage of human life almost exclusively in terms derived from physical processes. In this regard we do well to take a closer look at his discussion of intelligence, reason and memory as powers of the human soul. This problem is important because of its general Augustinian background, but much more so because of the twelfth century's growing Trinitarian

Furthermore, since pure elements cannot exist by themselves, all things consist of a mixture of elements. Following Boethius' *Commentary on Porphyry*, William considers it the primary epistemological task of the intellect to abstract from their mixed form, see *Glosae super Platonem* § CLXX, ed. Jauneau, 280: *vis est intellectus coniuncta disiungere* ('the power of the intellect is to separate conjoined things').

²⁸ See *Philosophia* IV, XXVII (*Qualiter anima sit in compositione hominis*), ed. Maurach, 111–12.

²⁹ See *Philosophia* I, XII § 41, ed. Maurach, 36–37.

preoccupation. Ever the scientist, William appears to give a remarkable twist to the powers of the soul by connecting their status to the issue of human development. In his view, original sin has affected the human constitution in such a way that all human beings are in need of sufficient experience before they are able to activate the powers of these faculties at all. One may wonder if this would have been different had humanity stayed in paradise, but unfortunately William does not give us his thoughts on this subject. What interests him far more is the fact that the process of bodily growth directly enhances the adequate functioning of the soul's powers. As he eagerly explains, warmth and humidity characterize the stage of infancy, as both these qualities are needed to further the babies' ability to digest food. Because the constant need for drink tends to induce the discharge of fluids, however, babies are prone to generating fumes which, in turn, are known to have a destabilizing impact on their brain. As a consequence, their power to understand is sharply disrupted.³⁰

Thanks to the *Timaeus* then, William is able to align the universe at large in his own ingenious way with the human universe contained by it, as both are the product of one and the same God. Following from this theoretical insight, he considered it the specific task of scientists like himself to make the laws of both macro- and microcosm apparent to the untrained minds of their fellow scholars and students.³¹ Thanks to the *Timaeus*, furthermore, William came to regard the universe and human nature more and more as organisms subject to processes of change and growth. Consequently, there was no need for these organisms to rely on divine intervention for every new stage of their development. Not only did the cosmos evolve naturally from the four elements—themselves unseen—whose innate tendencies produced the visible elements, thereby gradually bringing forth God's entire universe, but even the creation of humanity could be explained in this way. For why should humanity's creation be

³⁰ See esp. *Philosophia* IV, XXIX, ed. Maurach, 112–14.

³¹ After giving his own description of the stages of human life, William concludes his *Philosophia* with some pedagogical remarks concerning the ideal psychological mindset of the master (... *solo amore sapientiae doceat*...) and student (... *qui magistrum ut patrem diligit*...) and the best order of learning. Thus organic or physical growth and psychological or educational growth are closely related for him. See *Philosophia* IV, XXX–XXXIII, ed. Maurach, 114–16.

severed from that of nature by being regarded as the result of a direct divine act? This question caused William to rethink the issue of creation, including humanity's creation, in an original way. Starting from the elements and their qualities, he reconstructed his own 'chain reaction'. It appeared to him that the earth, being very muddy at first, had become affected by the boiling heat of fire so as to begin bringing forth various kinds of animals more or less spontaneously. The first man must have come into being in approximately the same way. William argues that his body was formed first. It was made from visible earth which, as said, contained a mixture of all the elements, but the mixture in this case, as he was the first human to be formed, was nearly perfectly balanced. In William's opinion, the body of the first man was clearly more perfect than the body of the first woman. Since the latter was formed from the mud that was lying nearby, it did not possess the same perfect balance. According to William's exegetical approach, which we do well to call metaphorical (*translative*) rather than allegorical, Genesis wants to convey this scientific information to us when stating in Gen. 2:7 that Eve was formed from Adam's rib.³²

Although he remains a loyal supporter of the Christian view that God furnishes each human being with an individual soul, it is evident that the inquisitiveness of William's scientific mind has brought about a significant shift of emphasis. This is especially true when we compare his text to Thierry's, which we studied before. Obviously, creation is the operative term in both cases. Taking his cue from the *Timaeus* but including under it much more than the literal events

³² See *Philosophia* I, XIII § 42–43, ed. Maurach, 38: 'But because the earth was muddy on account of the water placed above it, burning from heat, it created diverse sorts of animals from itself. . . . From that part, however, in which the elements came together through equal distribution the human body was made. . . . But it should not be believed that the soul, which is spirit and light and clean, is made from mud, but that it is conferred upon man by God . . .'. Cf. Gen. 2:7, where God created man *ex limo terrae* and blew the *spiraculum vitae* in his face. Since according to Boethius: *omnis aequalitas pauca et finita* ('all equality is few and limited'), only one human was formed this way. William continues: 'But since it is highly likely that what is closest to this state of equality, that is, of lesser quality but still somewhat balanced, namely the body of woman, is created from the nearby mud, she is neither completely the same as man nor entirely different nor equally balanced, for even the warmest woman is colder than the coldest man. . . . For the fact that God took a rib from the first man should not be considered an item of literal belief.' Cf. Gen. 2:21 the creation of woman *ex latere Adae*. See also *Glosae super Platonem* § LII, ed. Jeaneau, 121–22.

of the first six days that formed Thierry's more narrowly scriptural paradigm, William extends the term to cover the complete life span both of humanity and of the cosmos. Whereas Thierry wants to give a literary reading of Genesis, be it one that was also scientifically accurate, William appears drawn much more to the notion of trying to lay bare nature's inner workings. In the case of humanity's creation, this means that he was especially interested in the physical process by which men and women, from Adam and Eve until the people in his own day, become effective co-creators as they possess the innate capacity of producing new humans together. The near-divine splendor reflected by that creative possibility, an inherent attribute of their created state, interests him far more in fact than any divine act leading up to it, as God mysteriously fashioned the first two inhabitants of paradise. Or rather, as he gave souls to their bodies made from the natural elements.

With great energy, therefore, William sets out to give detailed descriptions of, among other things, the growth of the human fetus, the precise functions of different human organs, and the consecutive stages of human life.³³ While he is careful not to rule out the possibility that God could decide again to create humans in the original, albeit metaphorical, way recorded in Genesis, he all but eliminates the possibility. Obviously, there is no end to the things God can accomplish, for in an example that was to become much celebrated, William says that God could even form a calf out of a tree-trunk. But any departure from the physical chain of procreation set in motion on account of the natural creation of Adam and Eve would have to be preceded by a new act of the divine will. And William simply cannot find a plausible motive for this.³⁴ For him it seems all but clear that God had ordained natural childbirth as his preferred way of monitoring creation.

In Platonic terms, one could say that God chose to delegate his creative power to the so-called *natura operans*. With the term *natura*

³³ In *Philosophia* IV, VII § 15, ed. Maurach, 95: 'But since we have explained the composition of the first man and woman in the first volume, how man was made from the mud of the earth, we shall now speak of man's daily creation, his formation, birth, phases of life, body parts, duties and functions of his body parts'. The remainder of Book IV is devoted to the *cotidiana hominis creatio*, which William extends to include even the process of human education.

³⁴ See *Philosophia* I, XIII § 44, ed. Maurach, 39. For William's 'rustic example' of the calf and the tree-trunk, see *Philosophia* II, II § 5, ed. Maurach, 43.

operans William refers to the integrated and animated world of physical creation, located somewhere on an intermediate level between the divine *opus creatoris* above it and the human *opus artificis* below it. If we are to attribute William's many-sided admiration for the cosmology of the *Timaeus* to a single motive, it might well be that in this work Plato has been able to lay bare the inner workings not just of nature, but more especially of *natura operans*. For William, who clearly wants to emulate his revered master on this point, the intricate structure of *natura operans* is not only a fitting testimony to the integration of macro- and microcosm, but it celebrates above all their divinely ordered harmony. In his eyes, the existence of such a harmony is an indispensable precondition, if the cosmos is to be effectively orchestrated.³⁵

III *Literary Aspects of William's Cosmology*³⁶

Notwithstanding the appeal of the *Timaeus* to various twelfth-century cosmological thinkers, it is important to point out here that as an author Plato had to offer much more than just scientific information. In addition to worldly wisdom, he offers rhetorical eloquence. It is ultimately because the *Timaeus* teaches science in mythological form that the Chartrian thinkers were so attracted to its author, on whom they conferred the highest philosophical credentials. And so it happened that the most venerated ancient philosopher could become the role model for a new kind of encyclopedic scholarship, in which

³⁵ See *Glosae super Platonem* § XXXVII, ed. Jeauneau, 104–05. For William the *opus naturae* with which *natura operans* is associated (*et est natura vis rebus insita similia de similibus operans*; 'for nature is the power inherent in things to work like from like') forms the middle level between the *opus creatoris* (by which he refers to the creation of elements as well as to divine miracles such as the virgin birth) and the *opus artificis* (human deeds propelled by indigence or need, i.e., building a house against the cold). Cf. also *Glosae super Platonem* § XLIV, ed. Jeauneau, 112: *Magnus actor est homo, maior natura, maximus creator* ('Man is a great achiever, nature a greater one, the Creator the greatest'). What is distinctive about *natura operans* is that, unlike God, it is not marked by eternity, but neither are its workings as volatile as human acts.

³⁶ One of the best treatments of William's literary techniques can be found in Dronke, *Fabula*, 13–78. In his analysis Dronke concentrates on an unpublished manuscript of William's commentary on Macrobius, which Jeauneau has characterized as one of his youthful works.

the new arts of the *quadrivium* were intimately combined with the more traditional ones of the *trivium*.

Just as most Chartrian cosmologers tended to see visible creation as a kind of veil, simultaneously shrouding and revealing the hidden, invisible causes of things, so the function of Platonic myth to them was to cloak an inner truth, one which the literary scholar must try to expound. In this regard it is important to make the following observation. While William may ultimately have been more interested in comprehending Plato's meaning beneath its narrative form, we should be careful not to consider this as a sign of disregard for the mythical exterior. In the same way we should also not misinterpret his preference for expounding the invisible principles of the universe rather than arranging its visible phenomena as a sign that he lacked interest in the physical knowledge gathered through sense perception. The reverse is more likely, so it seems, for the *Timaeus* myth may well have gained importance precisely because it was hiding so many secrets. Not only could it thereby give interpreters like William access to its underlying message or content, if he would just succeed in breaking its shell, but by concealing this message so ingeniously it also added a deeper meaning to it.

The important role of myth for William is best demonstrated by looking to his choice of genre in expounding the *Timaeus*. Surprisingly, he makes a rather sharp distinction between commenting on a text on the one hand and glossing it on the other. Whereas a commentary concerns itself solely with collecting the true meanings of the text (*in unum colligere*), the aim of glossing a text is to focus on the letter or continuation of the text (*continuatio litterae*) alongside its meaning in a clear attempt not to separate them. To put it differently, in a gloss one must expound the text in such a way as if the tongue of the doctor himself (*scil.* Plato) were uttering the words.³⁷ Still, despite all his love and respect for the outward form of Plato's text, William has to face the difficulty that Plato is ultimately an author from outside the Christian orbit.³⁸ This in itself sufficiently explains

³⁷ See *Glosae super Platonem* § X, ed. Jeuneau, p. 67: 'For a commentary, following only the meaning, does not deal at all with the continuation or the exposition of the letter. But the gloss traces all of these. For that reason it is called a gloss, that is, a tongue. For one must expound things so clearly as if the tongue of the doctor seems to be teaching'.

³⁸ William is aware of the discrepancies that separate Plato's words from scriptural

his recourse to the by now familiar interpretive device with which twelfth-century authors would try to overcome the discrepancy between the pagan fables seen as wrappings or *integumenta* and their underlying meaning as the intended truth of Christianity.³⁹ Whereas the introduction of this device hints at a kind of allegorical practice, inasmuch as the letter of the text is distinguished from its spirit, the importance of *integumentum* for William far outweighs its practical function as a necessary medium between pagan form and Christian meaning. Far from locking the interpreter into a formal contrast between appearance and reality or semblance and truth, the application of *integumentum* rather inspires William to fulfill his task of glossator only more diligently. Expounding Plato's meaning as he does, this Norman intellectual nevertheless strives hard not to put words into his revered predecessor's mouth. He wants to let Plato speak for himself. The effect of this use of *integumentum* is heightened when we realize that, according to William, Plato himself chose consciously to speak in *integumenta*.⁴⁰ By unraveling these as a good expositor, it thus appears William does not only build on his master's tradition but effectively continues it, just as his own students may some day do for him.

Approached from this angle, William's use of *integumentum* goes far beyond the mere clever invoking of rhetorical strategy. As an inter-

truth, but may on occasion be seen to turn this disadvantage into the philosopher's favor. Thus he can exclaim: 'But should it really surprise us if the academician, i.e., Plato, speaks from time to time in academic style? For if he would speak everywhere correctly, he would not have been an academician.' See *Glosae super Platonem* § CXIX, ed. Jeauneau, pp. 210–11. Jeauneau traces William's words back to a comment by Fulgentius on Vergil, see *Glosae*, 211 n. (b).

³⁹ On the notion of *integumentum*, see E. Jeauneau, 'L'usage de la notion d'*integumentum* à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches', *AHDLMA* 32 (1957): 35–87, repr. in: E. Jeauneau, *Lectio philosophorum. Recherches sur l'école de Chartres* (Amsterdam, 1973), 127–92; W. Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century. The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres* (Princeton, 1972), 36–48; W. Otten, 'Between Damnation and Restoration. The Dynamics of Human Nature in Eriugena's *Periphyseon* and Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*,' in: H.J. Westra (ed.), *From Athens to Chartres. Neoplatonism and Medieval Thought. Studies in Honour of Edouard Jeauneau* (Leiden, 1992), 342–43. See further especially the insightful discussion of *integumentum* and related metaphorical terms (*involutum*, *translatio*, *imago*, *similitudo*) in the works of William of Conches and Abelard in: Dronke, *Fabula*, 13–67.

⁴⁰ See the continuation of *Glosae super Platonem* § CXIX, ed. Jeauneau, 211: 'Yet if someone does not inspect Plato's words so much as his meaning, not only will he not find heresy but he will encounter the profoundest philosophy covered by verbal wrappings. And this we, lovers of Plato, will attempt to show'.

pretive device *integumentum* does not just help to make a pagan philosopher like Plato conform to Christian goals, but it touches the heart of Plato's philosophy directly. This last insight enables us to make sense of another idiosyncratic feature of William's recourse to Plato. For there seems to exist an odd contradiction between, on the one hand, his rigid insistence on rhetorical economy in explaining Plato's myth, and on the other, his surprising display of exegetical tolerance and doctrinal flexibility when engaging in the concrete interpretation of its content. To solve this discrepancy, let us start with William's rhetorical economy. At times we find him severely criticizing those who prefer the *ornatus verborum*, the pretty arrangement of words, to the *ornatus creaturarum*, the divine arrangement of created things.⁴¹ Words should not be merely decorative so as to draw away attention from the natural objects or processes they are meant to describe. Once again, we should resist the temptation to interpret his harsh words here as indicating any disrespect for Plato's chosen medium of myth. William launched this criticism ultimately for an altogether different reason, namely to underscore the need for close conformity and continuity between God's ordered arrangement of creation and the words selected to describe it, a conformity which the *Timaeus* so superbly embodies.⁴² In his relentless emphasis on congruity between words and things he is not unlike Peter Abelard, whose logical bend could similarly transform into a razor-like device, as he wanted to

⁴¹ A case in point is the Prologue to Book II of the *Philosophia*, where he contrasts his goal of explaining the arrangement of elements (*ornatus elementorum*) with his eagerness to avoid undue embellishment of words (*ornatus verborum*) so as more accurately to display the truth. See *Philosophia* II, Prologus, ed. Maurach, 41. In *Glosae super Platonem* § LXXI, ed. Jeauneau, 144, William describes the *ornatus mundi* as: *quicquid in singulis videtur elementis ut stelle in celo, aves in aere, pisces in aqua, homines in terra*, etc. ('And the arrangement of the world is whatever is seen in the individual elements like the stars in heaven, birds in the air, fish in water, men on earth, etc.').

⁴² The problem of how to convey nature's splendor in an adequate way is compounded by the underlying paradox of all God-talk. Given that creation is the product of a divine author who can only be truly known in the next life, as in this life he can never be described with proper dignity, it is incumbent upon human beings to continue to fine-tune created language in order that (a) it may fully capture created reality, as a condition for (b) becoming metaphorically and proleptically applied to God. Cf. *Glosae super Platonem* § XLII, ed. Jeauneau, 110: 'For all terms (*sermones*) are invented to speak about created things but later, upon gaining knowledge of the Creator, they are transferred to speak about God on account of a certain likeness such as the noun: father, son, and the following verbs: generated, created, made, wanted.' See also n. 82 below.

cut out all unnecessary verbosity to retain only those images that befit the mysterious harmony of the Trinity.⁴³ But while Abelard was active primarily on the level of semantics and logic, William's cosmological interest, which permeates even his most literary efforts, led him to capture the dynamics of reality to the fullest by conferring adequate praise on divine creation.

William's exegetical flexibility, on the other hand, speaks to a rather different point. It conveys to us that as an interpretive device the use of *integumentum* is ultimately dependent on, since conditioned by, the interest displayed in it by the philosophical *auctor* himself when constructing his own myth. As noted, according to William's view, it was clear that Plato himself spoke in *integumenta*.⁴⁴ If we want to hear the full harmony of Plato's philosophy, therefore, we cannot afford to overlook any of his metaphors by narrowing the *Timaeus*' interpretive range to a crude, literalist interpretation of Plato's myth. Through his deliberate show of exegetical tolerance William reveals how the concept of *integumentum* possesses what is indeed an unlimited range alongside an inherent polyvalence. He finds that all coherent interpretations are admissible as long as they fulfill one essential condition, that is, that they not contradict each other.⁴⁵ The reason why this is so has again to do with Plato. By imposing a forced closure on the chain of associations set in motion through the evocative power of myth, such contradictory readings would mistakenly and prematurely silence the voice of their original author, the venerated philosopher himself.

⁴³ See below ch. 4.IV, pp. 148–58.

⁴⁴ William repeatedly refers to Plato's use of *integumenta*, e.g. in *Glosae super Platonem* § LXXIV, ed. Jeaneau, 150: *Deinde subiungit qualiter, more suo per integumenta loquens* ('Then he added how, speaking in his usual manner through integuments'). Cf. also *Glosae*, § LXXX and § CXIII.

⁴⁵ William frequently harmonizes different authoritative texts by interpreting their statements on different levels. Thus he distinguishes between what is said *fabulose*, *astrologice* or *astronomicè*, as in *Philosophia* II, III, ed. Maurach, 44. While accepting the simultaneous existence of different levels of interpretation, however, he requires consistency on each level. This is why he makes a substantial distinction in *Glosae super Platonem* § CLXXII, ed. Jeaneau, 283–84 between understanding (*intellectus*), which builds on certainty and meaning (*opinio*), which he sees as *traducibilis*. As he explains: 'Transferable is that which can lead to contrary conclusions at one and the same time, such as opinion: because sometimes we find one thing, at other times we find the contrary. But understanding is not transferable, because once we derive a conclusion from something with our understanding, since understanding is always followed by certain reason, we can never be led to the opposite conclusion'.

IV *The Vision of William's Dragmaticon*⁴⁶

The fourth and largest part of this chapter analyzes how William brings together his different strands of argument in a comprehensive vision, as he succeeds in integrating his cosmological interests and rational division of the universe with his literary and rhetorical sensitivities. To illustrate this point I shall focus on his last known work, the *Dragmaticon Philosophiae*. While this work is recognizably Platonic in structure, as in it William engages in a dialogue or *dramatic* interchange with his employer and worldly lord, Geoffrey Plantagenet—hence the title *Dragmaticon*—, it does not present a traditional cosmology. In fact, it contains the most original and sustained exposition of William's natural philosophy. In the *Dragmaticon* William no longer feels the need to lash out at his opponents, as he did in the earlier *Philosophia*. Thus he silently omits any references to the World Soul. Going even further, he openly retracts his metaphorical interpretation of Eve's creation from Adam's rib, which had so irked William of St. Thierry and may well have scandalized other religious contemporaries. He appears quite eager indeed to avoid being branded a heretic, as his famous statement: 'Not the words make a heretic, but their defense' makes clear beyond a doubt.⁴⁷

Yet William's conciliatory tone of voice at the opening of the *Dragmaticon* should not induce us to think that his Platonic allegiance has in any way diminished. The fact that he structures this work as a dialogue is already a first indication that this might not be so. Instead of seeing it as a compromise, a homage to the literary Plato, his choice of genre is better regarded as a thinly veiled attempt to protect Plato's reputation as a serious philosopher, a reputation on which he has staked his own. This can help explain his unexpected move to call precisely on Plato's own principles to defend his decision, at first sight rather un-Platonic, to drop references to the *anima*

⁴⁶ Careful overviews of William's cosmology are given by Tullio Gregory, *Anima Mundi. La filosofia di Guglielmo di Conches e la scuola di Chartres* (Firenze, 1955), 175–246, and Dorothy Elford, 'William of Conches,' in: Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, 308–27.

⁴⁷ See *Dragmaticon* I.1.8, CCCM 152: 7: *uerba enim non faciunt haereticum, sed defensio*. A few lines earlier William compares his *Dragmaticon* to his earlier *Philosophia* as follows: *Est igitur nostrum consilium, quae in eo uera sunt, hic apponere, falsa dampnare, praetermissa supplere* (trans. Ronca/Curr, 5: 'It is our plan, therefore, to retain whatever is true in that booklet, to condemn its falsehoods, and to supply its omissions').

mundi. As William asserts in *Philosophia* I, VII § 19 philosophers state only the necessary. Given that even Plato himself saw the World Soul as an *integumentum*, William's own code of honor as a philosopher implies to him that the analogy between the World Soul and the Holy Spirit can ultimately be dispensed with as not essential.⁴⁸

At the same time, however, we should not fail to see how William enters on a new path in the *Dragmaticon* that will eventually take him far beyond the Chartrian practice of *lectio philosophorum*. In the eyes of some scholars this has made him a more successful physicist, although he remains heavily criticized in the opinion of most.⁴⁹ While we saw above how philosophers state only what is necessary, physicists focus instead on what is probable.⁵⁰ It is in the realm of probable knowledge also that William's chief interest will henceforth lie. This is borne out by the very scope of the *Dragmaticon*, as it sets out to explore the realms of macro- and microcosm on a much more comprehensive and systematic scale than the *Philosophia*. It devotes attention to such widely separate problems as the movement of the planets, the emergence of thunder and lightning and, increasingly, the mechanics of the human body.⁵¹

⁴⁸ On William's view of the World Soul as an *integumentum*, see Jeaneau, 'L'usage de la notion d'*integumentum* à travers les gloses de Guillaume de Conches,' in: *Lectio philosophorum*, 158–172.

⁴⁹ As revealed by Elford, William substantially develops and refines his theory of the elements in his *Dragmaticon* perhaps under the implicit criticism of Hermann of Carinthia's *De essentiis* (ca. 1143). See Elford, 'William of Conches,' 311–16 and *Dragmaticon* I.6.1–13, CCCM 152: 21–28. Neither Dijksterhuis nor Speer considers him a proper forerunner of modern science.

⁵⁰ See *Philosophia* I, VII § 19, ed. Maurach, 26: . . . *ut philosophi enim necessarium, etsi non probabile ponimus, ut physici vero probabile, etsi non necessarium adiungimus* ('For as philosophers we put forth the necessary, though not the probable, but as physicists we add the probable, though not the necessary'). For the distinction between necessary and probable, see Cicero, *De inventione rhetorica* I.29.44 (*Omnis argumentatio . . . aut probabilis aut necessaria debet esse*). For an application to the reading of the *Timaeus*, see *Glosae super Platonem* § XLVII; § CLXXI, ed. Jeaneau, 115: 281–82. William of St. Thierry appears to confuse these two levels of speech in his accusation that William *physice de Deo philosophatur*. See Leclercq, 'Les lettres de Guillaume de Saint-Thierry à Saint Bernard,' 389, line 248. The discussion of the elements in the *Dragmaticon* (see above n. 49) starts with a reference to *verisimiles rationes*. See *Dragmaticon* I.6.1, CCCM 152: 22.

⁵¹ In *Philosophia* IV XI § 19, ed. Maurach, 97–98, William suspended his medical speculation about the sexual appetite of women after giving birth and about the transmission of leprosy through sexual intercourse . . . *ne corda religiosorum, si forte hoc opus nostrum in manibus acceperint, diu loquendo de tali re offendamus . . .* ('. . . lest by speaking extensively on this matter we may offend the hearts of the religious, if they

There are various ways to analyze William's *Dragmaticon*. One is to point to the innovative content of its philosophy of nature. This has recently been done by Dorothy Elford and Andreas Speer with considerable success, as they point out novelties and consistencies in his analysis that were largely unknown and untried before. Both modern authors have done much work indeed to show how William's philosophy developed from the earlier *Philosophy* to the later *Dragmaticon*, thereby giving the later work the high and nuanced profile it deserves. Another, more literary, approach is represented by Peter Dronke's *Fabula*. In it Dronke painstakingly tries to point out how William of Conches managed to fuse the legacy of the classics creatively with that of Christianity through a careful use of *integumentum*. Dronke's focus in all this is more on William's various glosses than on the *Dragmaticon*, so it seems, although in its opening sentence quoted at the beginning of this study Dronke lauds this latter work as a masterpiece of the abstract and the concrete.⁵² What has not been done by any of William's modern commentators, however, is to show how he came to integrate the abstract and the concrete in his unique synthesis. This concretely is what the last part of this chapter intends to do.

Ironically, as we are dealing with a medieval rather than a contemporary writer, in my opinion this somehow requires us not just to engage in description but also to pass judgment, as we constantly need to legitimate which authors to include in our scholarly canon and why. Let me explain why I think this judgment is specifically necessary in the case of William. It has repeatedly been made clear by historians of natural philosophy like Dijksterhuis that William does not belong to the category of those medieval scientists who have made a lasting contribution to the development of the natural sciences.

happen to have received this little booklet of ours in their hands . . .'), yet he only returns to such themes with more insistence in *Dragmaticon* VI.8.1–14, CCCM 152: 205–11. Thus it seems William's deference to his critics in his later work does not seriously alter his scientific speculations on other controversial issues. William does not only expand his speculation about the human body and human nature considerably in *Dragmaticon* VI.7.1–VI.27.6 [CCCM 152: 203–73], but he also aligns it more closely with his explanation of the macrocosm. In this regard the notions of *vires naturae* and of *fumus* (vapor) are important, as they are adduced to explain such transitive processes as human growth, changes in the seasons, or even the dynamics of a thunderstorm.

⁵² See above ch. 1.I (The Quest for Universal Nature), p. 9 n. 2.

Part of the reason why Dijksterhuis and other scholars of medieval science excluded him was that he never expresses any interest in deriving practical applications from his theoretical views so as to control nature's mechanisms. For Dijksterhuis, his is a *theoria* of nature in the traditional sense of vision or contemplation. Furthermore, as Charles Burnett and Italo Ronca have shown, the material that William incorporates in his *Dragmaticon* is also not entirely new. We have already mentioned how he borrows freely from Constantine the African's *Pantegni* for his theory of the elements. It has lately been revealed how he also makes use of Adelard of Bath's *Quaestiones naturales*, although we should add that Adelard's questions themselves are also not novel ones, as they go back to pre-existing lists of questions that were available in the school milieu of the time.⁵³

But why this unusual need to pass judgment? Why is it not sufficient to stop at giving an overview of William's cosmology? In some ways, this certainly does suffice. Moreover, as I have said before but would here like to repeat, presenting such an overview has been done to considerable satisfaction already. On the other hand, it appears that such analyses usually do not extend much beyond presenting us with a mere summary of William's finished work, condemning him on the basis of later standards to the ill-deserved reputation of a failed scientist. Only by judging, as it appears, can we perhaps capture and communicate the imaginative vision projected by the work itself, of the *Dragmaticon* as William found himself engaged in 'creating' it rather than as the end product William has us read only after much polishing. Only by judging, therefore, can we engage in a true dialogue with William's vision as one at which his work as *opus artificis* continuously hints, but which it only provisionally brings out. In its combination of the abstract and the concrete, of the rational and the imaginative, of the esthetic and the moral, it is not just an exceptional and unique work, but it represents a scientific accomplishment of a rare artistic nature.

⁵³ See Charles Burnett, 'Scientific Speculations,' in: Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, 169–70. See also Southern, *Scholastic Humanism*, Vol. II, 70–71, and Ronca's Introduction to the *Dragmaticon*, pp. XXIX–XXXI.

A. *Primo Levi's* The Periodic Table

It appears the *Dr Mathematicon* undergoes a remarkable shift of emphasis at the beginning of book VI, switching from an earlier focus on the mystery of divine creation to a new interest in the daily practice of human births, the so-called *quotidiana hominis creatio*. On a larger scale, a similar paradigm shift may well seem to underlie William's entire approach in the *Dr Mathematicon*. Constituting an accurate reflection of his demythologizing take on the biblical book of Genesis, this innate transition presents him nevertheless with a literary problem of enormous proportions. Whereas the option of divine intervention offers an automatic guarantee that creation will always be associated with mystery and wonder, seeing creation as a daily process, presenting a never ending jumble of repetitive patterns interrupted by strange anomalies, makes this same sense of purpose much more difficult to maintain. The nooks and crannies of a divinely governed universe can easily be rolled out to become the alienating idiosyncrasies of an erratic nature. It is a tribute to William that he succeeds in maintaining nature's suspense, but it is much harder to grasp how he actually achieves it. Obviously, one can attempt to unveil his mastery of various literary techniques, as has been done to great effect by Peter Dronke and I have tried to do so far. But even that kind of analysis reveals only one part of the picture, as it does not give us an adequate sense of the very integration of the abstract and the concrete in William's *chef d'oeuvre*.

Hence my choice to use another approach here, one which will take us on a detour through the twentieth century before leading us back to the twelfth. For this, we need to go to the work of the twentieth-century chemist-*cum*-writer Primo Levi. As is widely known, Primo Levi was an Italian holocaust-survivor of Jewish descent. A chemist by training, he also developed into one of the most respected authors about the holocaust. Yet he also worked in a chemical factory after the war before retiring early and devoting himself full-time to writing. Sadly, he committed suicide in 1987. Levi first became a writer while still active as a chemist. Despite his international acclaim, he struggled long and hard to accept that in Italy his literary skills were recognized only late in his career. His work, if not overlooked entirely, undersold and was seen as a collage of reminiscences rather than as presenting the polished rhetoric of remembrance. In addition to lacking the flamboyance and literary flair of

many of his contemporaries, his descriptive prose was so realistic and lucid that for a long time the author of this prose was seen more as an eye witness than a writer. As his career began to unfold, however, it seemed Levi himself felt ever more intimidated by the great moral substance presented by the weight of his own memories, a substance that he found increasingly difficult to shape and control. Perhaps because of the continuing struggle with the overwhelming moral content of his memories, he felt an ever-greater need to contain them, to rein in the near-infinite hold they had on him. As a writer he struggled with the fact that he wanted to present the full weight of these memories in a presentable form that contained them rather than being contained by them. His was a great need and desire to exercise control through rhetorical and rational lucidity.

In what is perhaps his greatest work, *The Periodic Table*, which was first published in 1975,⁵⁴ he reaches a remarkable degree of success by adopting a very unusual method that related to his professional background as a chemist. As the title of his book already indicates, he organizes his literary material according to the elements of Mendeleev's periodic table. One of his recent biographers, Myriam Anissimov, has summarized his procedure in the book as follows:

He recalled the history of his family and the events that had shaped his life in twenty-one chapters, each of them bearing the name of one of the elements in the Russian chemist's classification system. They give a framework to the story of a series of trials suggesting oppositions—matter and mind, reality and fiction, order and chaos. The characters of the people in the book are often associated with the chemical and physical properties of the element whose name heads the chapter in which they appear. In other cases the element itself becomes a kind of character, and makes a concrete intervention in the story. . . . The narrative and the scientific themes fuse in *The Periodic Table* to present a kind of mirror of man at war with evil and with hostile matter, and Levi is convinced that the condition of the chemist reflects the human condition in general.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See Primo Levi, *The Periodic Table*, trans. R. Rosenthal (1975; New York, 1984).

⁵⁵ See M. Anissimov, *Primo Levi. Tragedy of an Optimist* (1996; Woodstock, NY, 1999), 316. My point here is neither to draw far-reaching conclusions about Levi's life and works nor to judge one of his biographies as better than another. Recently, two new biographies have appeared, see C. Anger, *The Double Bond: Primo Levi* (London, 2002) and I. Thompson, *Primo Levi* (London, 2002).

Levi himself called his book 'a masterpiece of rationality, an existential parable' and it is precisely this combination of the rational and the metaphorical that made this work such a unique literary and moral accomplishment. It appears as if the evil that had befallen him, the life of his people, and his century, were of such inexpressible magnitude that the only way he could describe it was by trying to exercise ultimate control over it, a control which would necessarily be of a rational nature. While the precise motives behind his approach remain exceedingly difficult to trace, somehow only full transparency could bring home the true moral urgency of the matter to his audience for him. As he states it: '... When reason surrenders, Nazism and Fascism are not far away'.

B. *William of Conches'* *Dragmaticon*

The prime reason why I want to bring Primo Levi's approach to bear on the analysis of the *Dragmaticon* in this chapter is that it can help us to highlight the unique character of William's artistic achievement as a kindred combination of the scientific and the literary. Since the spirit of William's discourse is so far removed from our age and experience that it seems almost impossible to retrieve it, comparing and contrasting it with Levi's on the issue of how to blend literature and science might be one way of bringing William's achievement to light again. It seems in many ways that William's approach is the opposite of Levi's, even though in saying so we should keep in mind that there is a deep similarity as well. For what they undoubtedly share is a great fascination with the coloring of reality and a deep desire accurately to capture and evoke it in a way that transcends the flatness of ordinary literary description. To get a firmer grip on the idiosyncratic view of nature which William's *Dragmaticon* ultimately presents, however, we do best to focus on those points where they most seem to stand apart.

Another way of bringing out the unusual allure of Levi's works touched on above is to point to the divergence between their 'thick' portrayal of human reality expressed in a style that is deliberately kept 'razor-thin'.⁵⁶ It is as if with a minimum of stylistic intervention

⁵⁶ Although they originated with Gilbert Ryle, I have used the terms 'thick' and 'thin' here in the sense given to them by Clifford Geertz. See C. Geertz, 'Thick

Levi wants to canvass a maximum of human life and misery. Resorting to such a minimalist style was apparently the only way for Levi to reduce his memories to manageable proportions, especially—but not exclusively for that reason—since he had himself been the victim of many of the experiences he described. On the whole, his works navigate in circumspect manner between pronouncing either a sentence of good or a verdict of evil, avoiding both the black of cruelty and the white of generosity. Under the circumstances such a sentence could only be perceived as gratuitous, as it would neither add nor detract from the gruesome nature of most of the experiences which he details. Nevertheless, it is clear that his works aim at passing moral judgment, be it not in emotional or ethical, but in rational terms. As Levi states: ‘... When reason surrenders, Nazism and Fascism are not far away’.

In *The Periodic Table*, then, Levi coins a new and unheard-of humanist strategy by fusing science and literature in such a way as to arrive at a perfect balance. He was able to do so not by oscillating between good and evil, but by carefully intertwining testimony and fiction,⁵⁷ as these are the two closest literary companions of human truth. Drawing on his background as a chemist and embedding his memories in the chemical setting of the table of Mendeleev, Levi proved capable not just of evoking the fraught reality he wanted to describe but of ultimately ‘ennobling’ it, similar to how one ennobles a metal. The chapter on the element Argon, in which he portrays his ancestors for us, represents a good example of his approach. Their history as Jewish-Italian immigrants, who were forced to live life on the margins of European society and miraculously yet unobtrusively succeeded in doing so, was much like the gas Argon itself ‘noble, inert and rare’. An extremely powerful example is found in the final chapter, which tells the story of carbon. Here we follow Levi moving through a long chain of associations, like the long stable chain that the element itself is capable of weaving, as it is the key element

Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,’ in: Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), 5–23.

⁵⁷ A similar procedure of mixing testimony and fiction translated into an unusual blend of memory and loss is used to great effect by the German author W.G. Sebald. In his remarkable novel *The Emigrants* (1993; London, 2002), he sketches the portraits of four Jewish émigrés whose lives appear to have so been disrupted by displacement as to make their existence before all unreal, even though the author documents it with pictures, drawings and bits of writing.

of living substance. The carbon in the story finally reaches the author's brain and, in a nice twist carried out with mathematical precision, allows Levi to end the story as well as the book by guiding his hand to write a final dot on the paper.⁵⁸

Just as in Levi's case, it appears William's aim was likewise to blend science and humanity, or science and art for that matter, as the term most apt to characterize the collective literary aspects of his quest, within a single organic framework. Misunderstandings have likewise arisen, from William of St. Thierry seeing him as a heretic in his own days to his modern day students who are rightly interested in proving that he was a reliable 'witness' to the advanced cosmological and physical knowledge available to him at the time.⁵⁹ But his stature as witness to the scientific developments of the twelfth century should not make us forget that he regarded nature as somehow locked in a stalemate between giving divine testimony, in its capacity of providing us with adequate scientific information, and serving as an outlet for human fiction. This may help us understand why John of Salisbury could call him the greatest grammarian after Bernard of Chartres. Above all, it may help us understand how the literary aspects of his work should not be discarded as mere embellishments, but need to be truly integrated with the overall picture one presents of the *Dragmaticon*.

The *Dragmaticon* has been established to be a work of William's mature age. As such it is not surprising that it takes up many of the familiar themes of his youthful *Philosophia*, although it gives them a different emphasis. Written after he had completed the *Glosae super Platonem*, furthermore, with their rather conventional line-by-line analysis of the *Timaeus*, it displays much more rhetorical flair. Still, its prime goal remains unchanged in the sense that William seems to

⁵⁸ See Levi, *The Periodic Table*, 3–20 (Argon), 224–233 (Carbon). Levi's ending of his story on Carbon compares nicely to how Bernard Silvestris ends his poem *Mathematicus* with the hero taking his own life as an oblique reference to the end (*explicit*) of the poem, see below chapter 6.V (The Art of Ambiguity), p. 255.

⁵⁹ See R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky and F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion and Art* (1964; repr. Nendeln, Liechtenstein, 1979), 102–111. The authors of this seminal study rightly claim that William held a close connection with the medical scientific literature of his time. Yet by claiming that he actually wanted to deduce his views on physiology and cosmology from the Bible (p. 105), they seem to operate on an anachronistic division between science and literature comparable to that between faith and reason. My own reading of William precisely attempts not to impose such dichotomies.

aim at giving a comprehensive view of nature by closely observing its workings. In this respect it is important to note the function of observation, in this case the observation of natural reality, as it fulfills a rather different filtering role for William than it does for Levi. Rather than editing some things out, as Levi felt obligated to do in order to master the monstrosity of his human memories, William seemed keen precisely on including them. Incorporating certain aspects not generally integrated before with the image of nature, the *Dragmaticon* presents us in the end with a 'thick' picture of natural reality, approximating the beauty of reality itself, as William opts for a maximalist and ornate approach as opposed to Levi's ascetic and minimalist descriptions. Rather than attributing moral good and evil, or their 'natural' equivalents of order and chaos, to immediate and active divine intervention, William assimilates these aspects—which could easily be separated out and treated individually, as would be the scholastic tendency—into his own 'thick' portrayal of natural reality. Only by reassembling them as integral parts of a larger picture, can he hope to bring reality—or as he is wont to call it after his master in the *Timaeus*: *natura operans*—to life beyond the level of scientific fact, that is, in its pulsating vivaciousness. Nature, as he evokes rather than describes it, is thus far more than the mere end product of God's powerful arm of creation, even though in the last analysis he is still willing to uphold that conventional view as well. What is most striking in his depictions is that somehow for William the universe, whose being he regards as concentrated on the level of *natura operans*, begins to loom large as a world of wonder, even to herself. Does she not magically combine an ornamental and decorative side, indicated by the term *ornatus mundi*, with a spiritual core or soul, for which he fittingly uses the term *mundus animatus*? To project the mystery of nature rather than solving scientific riddles is what William sees as his chief task in the *Dragmaticon*. It is as if the need to compose this work as a creative whole, thereby reflecting the very creative whole of the universe itself, overrides and synthesizes the individual questions he needs to answer in the process.

In contradistinction to Levi, who paints a chastened reality as a way of helping him to channel its overwhelming emotionality, William outfits nature with innumerable features and adornments as a way of helping him to reveal her remarkable beneficence and liberality, and to put it on display in one sweep. Only in this way, so it appears, can he bring out the powerful reality of creation's factual causation

by the divine with a creative intensity that ranges beyond the meaning of conventional theological doctrine, even though his cosmos never quite possesses the ornate lavishness found in Bernard Silvestris. Just as for Levi—and this is where their diverging approaches may yet strive for similar results—so for William the ultimate aim was likewise to shape the full range of amorphous reality by throwing the net of reason over it. His overriding aim in attempting to make natural reality understandable to the human mind was to confront it wholesale, rather than suppressing or subduing it through forced analysis. While it is true that William's reality, in contrast to Levi's, circles primarily around natural rather than moral or emotional phenomena, the latter should clearly be integrated with William's presentation of reality as well rather than being excluded as forensic elements in a scientific whole. From the above analysis it can only be concluded that, to the extent that esthetic and ornamental cosmic details are part of the *Dragmaticon's* literary text, William holds them to be an integral part of the texture of the universe.

B. 1. *God's Creation of the World*

A brief impression of the book's opening pages may illustrate how William goes about his task of presenting a comprehensive and integrated view of nature. Compared to Eriugena or Boethius, it appears he wants to condense the dynamism of the universe into a single nuclear image. Hence he opens his book with a definition of the term 'substance', but he does so only to append a division to it in a manner not unlike the *Periphyseon*: 'Substance is a thing that exists by itself, but being created is different from being the creator'.⁶⁰ Rather than stressing the infinity of nature or its *universitas*, with the possible need for a concomitant division to oversee it, William uses the term 'substance' (*substantia*) above all to make nature transparent, a transparency best served by bringing out its innate structure instead of focusing on its outstretched confines. He opens the second part of book VI on the human person in much the same way, i.e., by descending on a representative nuclear image. This time he begins his treatment with the image and analysis of sperm, in which

⁶⁰ See *Dragmaticon* I.2.2, CCCM 152: 11: *Substantia est res per se existens, sed alia est creatrix, alia creata* (trans. Ronca/Curr, 7: 'Substance is a thing existing in itself, but there is one substance that creates and another that is created').

all of humanity is contained.⁶¹ The division into creative and created substance appears added not so much to determine authorial territory as to indicate scientific perspective. William's perspective is that of creation and henceforth he abandons the angle of the divine, as we will see in what follows.

After a short confession of faith taking care of the *substantia creatrix*, William quickly moves on to survey the *substantia creata*. This will give him sufficient opportunity to return to the divine from time to time, but he will consistently do so from a created perspective, treating its integral presence in creation rather than seeing it as an objective cause. He divides up created substance into visible and invisible created substance. Moving first to deal with the invisible, such as demons and angels in I.5, William delays the treatment of the soul until he comes to treat of humanity as a whole, which will not be until the second part of book VI. This division also does not really prove very effective as an actual division, for when he next moves on to discuss the invisible elements, i.e., fire and air, he combines their treatment immediately with that of the other two (visible) elements, water and earth. He defines the elements as follows: 'There are in every body minimal parts which when joined together constitute one big body; these we call elements', a definition which squares with that of Constantine's *Pantegni*.⁶² He names these elements by their familiar names of water, earth, air and fire after which he lists their accompanying qualities, such as: cold and moist for water, dry and cold for earth, warm and moist for air and warm and dry for fire. Next he begins to speak about creation, seeing it as a joint work of created nature and the transcendent creator. In his view, God had created one big body in which all the elements were mixed, which the philosophers called chaos. That concluded the creator's direct activity in nature, as his tasks were to bring forth the elements and the human souls out of nothing, to bring about Christ's birth from a virgin and to effect the resurrection of the dead.

⁶¹ See *Dragmaticon* VI.7.1, CCCM 152: 204: *Sperma igitur est hominis semen ex puriore substantia omnium membrorum compositum* (trans. Ronca/Curr, 134: 'Sperm, then, is the male semen made of the most pure substance [drawn] from all parts of the body').

⁶² *Dragmaticon* I.6.6, CCCM 152: 24: *Sunt igitur in unoquoque corpore minima, quae simul iuncta unum magnum constituunt; haec a nobis dicuntur elementa* (trans. Ronca/Curr, 15: 'There are, therefore, in each body minimal components that when joined together, constitute a single large object. These we call elements').

Upon God's disappearance from the scene, William now properly enters the realm of *opus naturae*. With nature herself explicitly responsible for creation on this cosmological level, it is important to see how she goes about her work. This is a theme that is problematized in Alan's two poems about Nature, the *Plaint* and the *Anticlaudianus*, to which we will come back in our final chapter. But let us here take a closer look at William. It is the custom of nature to fashion first something rude and mixed, only thereafter to form and shape it. With a remark that again oddly echoes Eriugena's opening of the *Periphyseon* with its unique definition of theophany, we find this statement at the end of the *Dragmaticon*'s first book:

Therefore, because nature and the craftsman were unable to come up to the Creator's work, the Creator determined to come down to their standard. For, if this were not so, it would be thought to be a weakness in nature whenever things were created mixed by her. Or, as others say, God created mixed things to show how much confusion of things was possible if his own love were not ordering them.⁶³

The importance of this statement and the correspondence with Eriugena lies in the fact of God's condescension.⁶⁴ This in itself is a remarkable feat. But this passage gives out subtle, more implicit signals as well. In his chaos-theory William had refuted the idea that God needed to order the elements so as to manifest his power. Here it is not God's power but his love that comes to the fore. For William, it appears as if the creator's love must 'naturally' translate into the beauty of creation. It is that inclusive, near-divine beauty that he can only conceptualize in terms of harmony and symmetry, which his work so wants to bring out. By doing so, William does nothing more in his own mind than to echo the inherent principle of nature itself, as it is ultimately *natura operans* who accomplishes all this: she arranges the cosmos as much in an esthetic as in an orderly

⁶³ *Dragmaticon* I.7.4, CCCM 152: 31, trans. Ronca/Curr, 18.

⁶⁴ Eriugena describes theophany in anthropological terms as a result of the condescension of the divine Word, thus distinguishing it from incarnation. See *Periphyseon* I 449B, CCCM 161: *Ex ipsa igitur sapientiae dei condescensione ad humanam naturam per gratiam et exaltatione eiusdem naturae ad ipsam sapientiam per dilectionem fit theophania* (PP I, ed. and trans. Sheldon-Williams, 53: 'So from this condescension of the Wisdom of God upon human nature through grace, and the exaltation of the same nature to that same Wisdom through choice, theophany is brought about'). This element of divine condescension and, generally, the presence of the divine in the natural, is not treated in Klibansky e.a., *Saturn and Melancholy*.

physiological way. Hence also his indignation at being branded a heretic, as one only needs to follow reason to see that his descriptions are accurate. The actual definition of nature that William uses is well known from other sources, surfacing in Alan as well: *natura est uis quaedam rebus insita, similia de similibus operans* and the notion of making like from like will feature repeatedly in the rest of his treatise.⁶⁵ William obviously does not need to be original on this score. But there is contrariety in nature as well, and interviewed by the count, the philosopher William will now have to account for that.

B. 2. *Nature and the Earth*

In book II the count wants to know how God created the bodies of what we now call the elements from the one great body he had formed. According to William, God just followed the innate characteristics of the elements. To this end he put the hot and dry element of fire in the highest position and the dry and cold element of earth in the lowest position, with the other two in between. We thus arrive at the well-known twelfth-century image of the earth as an egg:⁶⁶

As corroborated by [natural] philosophers, the configuration of our world resembles that of an egg. As in the middle of the egg is the yoke and on every side of it the white, around the white the skin, around which is the shell, outside of which there is nothing more of egg; so in the middle of the world there is the earth, all around it from every part water flows, around the water there is air, around which is fire, outside which there is nothing.⁶⁷

Just as the divine has been incorporated into the beauty of nature, the *praeclara mundi machina*, so nothingness is safely excluded. In the same way William has dispensed with chaos as a dark force preceding the ordered arrangement of the universe, he here manages to do away with the danger of the void. Henceforth the *Dragmaticon's* dialogue will touch only on what is inside the egg. This will lead William first into a rather technical discussion along familiar Platonic

⁶⁵ *Dragmaticon* I.7.3, CCCM 152: 30, trans. Ronca/Curr, 18: *Natura est uis quaedam rebus insita, similia de similibus operans* ('Nature is a certain force implanted in things, producing similar from similar'). See also ch. 2 n. 75 on Alan's *Plaint*, where *Natura* is responsible for making like from like.

⁶⁶ On the fable of the cosmic egg as a prominent cosmological theme in the twelfth century, see Dronke, *Fabula*, 79–99.

⁶⁷ *Dragmaticon* II.2.8, CCCM 152: 39, trans. Ronca/Curr, 25.

lines on the necessity of two middle elements rather than one, which we have already explained above. Typical of his rational approach, however, is the fact that when the count comes up with an alternative to his Platonizing theory, William refuses to speculate on the possibility of God creating only a single middle element or creating a whole new element altogether. With God having disappeared from the cosmological scene, there should be no external meddling with *natura operans* who now reigns supreme. As he states explicitly:

Philosopher: I set no limit to the divine power, although I do say that, if He had done that, there would not be air, without the breathing of which a human being cannot live longer than seven hours, nor would there be water, the use of which is necessary to human beings in many things.

Count: If God wished the world exist without humanity, one single middle body between these two extremes could have sufficed?

Philosopher: Not if the world were to maintain its present nature.⁶⁸

Manente rerum natura, non. It is clear that for William reserving extraordinary powers for the divine does not mean that the innate structure of *natura operans* will be affected. In a sense, God's hands are tied as well, in the sense that he also, as much as the natural philosopher researching the cosmos, must abide by the laws of *natura operans*. After all, although created by him she is *res per se existens*. To explain the harmony brought about by the mediation of these two middle elements, William uses the term *sinzugia*, which he probably derived from Macrobius. Syzygy is the conjunction, through a mean, of bodies that differ in qualities. This helps him to explain how the two elements directly opposed to each other—for example, earth, which is obtuse, dense, and immobile and fire, which is acute, subtle, and mobile—always need two middle elements. With each of these mediating elements they have two attributes in common, while they differ in a third. Thus water being obtuse, dense, and mobile and air being obtuse, subtle, and mobile are jointly put in between earth and fire. Air and fire correspond in being both subtle and mobile, while they differ in that fire is acute and air obtuse. Water and earth on the other hand, correspond in being both obtuse and

⁶⁸ *Dragmaticon* II.4.2–3, CCCM 152: 43, trans. Ronca/Curr, 28.

dense, while water is mobile and earth immobile. In other cases, there may be need for just one mediating element, as in the case of earth and fire which can be linked either by water or by air, or of water and air which can be linked either by fire or by earth. It is thus through conjunction or syzygy, therefore, that the elements are capable of sustaining a connection to each other, mingling harmoniously while avoiding the extreme reaction of reciprocal destruction. With the possibility of nature's self-destruction thus safely excluded, the development of nature as a *machina mundi* can truly begin. William continues this second book of the *Dragmaticon* by talking about motion, while he ends it with a clever pun on his physiological theme, judging that both the count and he himself need a rest from the discussion.

B. 3. *Humanity and the Role of Reason*

In book VI, the final and longest one of the *Dragmaticon*, William starts giving more analytical remarks about the earth only to move on to the daily creation of human beings. In this book he again displays a profound interest in nature's symmetry. This time he brings up the subject of human antipodes, i.e. those human beings living on the other side of the equator, and that of our and their *antioeci*, i.e., those human beings living on the other side of the meridian that divides the earth into east and west. William claims not to believe in the actual existence of these antipodes, stating that he only brings them up because the philosophers discuss them. What concerns him most is not an interest in the quality of their hypothetical life, therefore, but rather the difference in the seasons and the alternation of day and night that can be found in the four inhabitable zones thus created.

He then moves on to discuss the one actually inhabited zone, analyzing first its climate before switching from the subject of the earth itself to the things supported by the earth. After touching on herbs and grasses and the irrational animals, he quickly continues with the most important part of this book, namely the treatise on human life and existence.

William had already touched on the creation of humanity when he discussed the creation of animals in book III. The two questions that came up there were the following. Why was there only one human being created and not many, as in the case of the animals, and in which season did humanity's creation actually take place? To

explain the reason why just one human being was created William had referred to Boethius' famous statement: *aequalitas pauca et finita; inaequalitas numerosa et multiplex*, after which he added explicitly that God created woman as a helper to man, by which he referred to her physically inferior status. The season of creation was spring, to which both the Old Testament and Vergil attest, because it was the only temperate one in the mildness of whose climate human beings and other creatures were best able to flourish and survive.⁶⁹

In book VI William comes back to man's temperate creation when discussing his growth. He there gives a most interesting answer to the question of oneness and multiplicity of the human race by considering the difference between human beings to be the result of sin and the consequent expulsion of paradise. As he states it:

For the first human being was perfectly temperate, as he had equal shares of the four qualities. But after he had been driven out of the amenity of paradise and began to eat bread by the labor of his hands in the valley of tears and misery, his body began to dry out from this labor of his as well as the deprivations of food and sleep, his natural heat to fade away. Similarly, the intemperate weather, and the quality of his food and drink affected him. [3] His descendants, therefore, born as they were from a corrupt ancestor, have all been corrupted, and never afterwards has perfect health been found in humans.⁷⁰

When the count states that this is an inaccessible definition (*abrupta diffinitio*), since it is not put forth by anybody else in his time, William answers simply: 'No wonder, for nature is corrupt.'⁷¹ Here we find what I see as the ultimate source of William's interest in syzygies, harmony and health: his attempt to present nature in such a way as to bring out its beauty and corruption in one discourse. In a way it seems such devices as syzygy can all be seen as attempts to undo the effects of the fall, to see through and behind the corrupted state of nature so as to catch a glimpse of how the cosmos had been originally designed. Rather than causing primarily a moral decline, for William sin has brought about a slight unevenness in nature, even though it remains essentially good,⁷² resulting in the possibility and challenge of endless variations, both moral and natural.

⁶⁹ See *Dragmaticon* III.4.5–9, CCCM 152: 66–68.

⁷⁰ *Dragmaticon* VI.13.2–3, CCCM 152: 227, trans. Ronca/Curr, 147.

⁷¹ *Dragmaticon* VI.13.4, CCCM 152: 228: *Nimirum, cum corrupta est natura.*

⁷² In an unpublished dissertation defended at Duke University in 1978, John H.

But while in an earlier age Eriugena could choose to attempt to undo the effects of the fall through a new reading of Genesis, this is no longer an option for William. Here it is a factor that William's professional focus is primarily that of a natural philosopher, rather than a metaphysical exegete. While we cannot find what his alternative vision in terms of offering a remedy for nature's fall is really about in the form of a new reading of Genesis, it can be effectively gleaned from the last two chapters of his work. In the final analysis, it is not through the moral lens of sin that William wants to approach the study of nature. In conformity with this, he does not regard the endless variations of natural beings pointing to nature's corruption as representing any kind of moral deficiency. Here William clearly goes a different route than we find in Alan of Lille. For William, nature's vagaries represent above all the pathway by which we can come to know the inner workings of *natura operans* both more intimately and securely. Precisely on this point of nature's explication of her inner motives there is a fundamental congruity between the cosmological process of creation on the one hand and the epistemological process of human discovery on the other. As an effect of this congruity the *Dragmaticon* seems to make it almost impossible for its readers to adjudicate which comes first for William.

In *Dragmaticon* VI.26 William points out what the consequences are of this parallelism of cosmology and epistemology. Just as he demonstrates in book I that God formed one large mixed body before the individual bodies of the four elements were shaped, it now appears that the mind works in more or less the same way. Moving through the sense perception of corporeal things resulting in opinion, the mind begins to shape and refine its knowledge. Only after it has moved through the laborious process of reasoning, does the mind arrive finally at the clarity of intelligence, something that in the words of Plato is 'only for God and a very few men'. When the count asks how it is that intelligence can be born from reason, William unravels this mystery in the following way:

Newell Jr. has revealed how William has only three references to the fall in his *Glosae super Platonem*, namely on pp. 117–118, 213 and 219, just as he elsewhere also de-emphasizes this theme. See his *The Dignity of Man in William of Conches and the School of Chartres in the Twelfth Century*, 116 n. 36. Yet rather than downplaying the fall, in my opinion William integrates its effects in Levi-like fashion by preferring a chastened rhetoric of nature, as its embellishments are kept in proportion.

Intelligence is born of reason not because reason becomes intelligence, but because it is the cause for it. For as the first people, led by reason, recognized the nature of bodies, they considered what bodies were able to achieve, and perceiving [certain] actions that could not be from bodies, they realized that their agent could not be anything corporeal. They called this agent the spirit, and directing the sharpness of their intellects to it, first they formed opinions about it, some false, some true. They eliminated the false opinions by long and laborious efforts and confirmed the true ones by necessary arguments. And so, under the guidance of reason, intelligence was born. For intelligence is the true and certain judgment about incorporeal things.⁷³

Just as material creation took shape gradually, as the elements began to experience the impulses that stemmed from their innate qualities, so intelligence is born out of a long and laborious process of reasoning, a process endemic to all human beings. To perform humanity's natural task of investigative reasoning, and continue performing it, is precisely what William feels he and his contemporaries have to do. In his eyes, they are perfectly capable of doing so, if only so many of them were not so negligent. Besides, what they present as a theological shortcut, namely the attribution of things to the direct intervention of divine power, is in fact not a solution at all. For, as William goes on to state in *Dragmaticon* VI.26.5: 'This intelligence ascends from us to the creator' (*intelligentia ista a nobis ad creatorem ascendit*). Since tracing knowledge back to its ultimate source, namely God, is always the goal of true and certain understanding, why should one jump to this conclusion right away? Only when no rationale can be found, then perhaps one can attribute things to the creator's omnipotence. Yet to forego what is humanity's exclusive prerogative as a creature, which it shares only with the divine itself, namely to receive understanding (*intelligentia*), without having followed reason to get there as the path most typical of human creativity, is an option William vehemently rejects.

B. 4. *The Role of the Teacher*

As he states earlier in the case of the waters above the firmament, William is not about to forego his task as a teacher simply by attributing things on the level of *natura operans* to the divine. As he states in book III.2.8:

⁷³ *Dragmaticon* VI.26.4, CCCM 152: 267, trans. Ronca/Carr, 171.

What is more foolish than to assume that something exists simply because the Creator is able to make it? Does He make whatever He can? Therefore, whoever says that God makes anything contrary to nature should either see that it is so with his own eyes, or show the reason for its being so, or demonstrate the advantage of its being so.⁷⁴

From these three exclusionary conditions the combined effect of which is to sway one never to conclude that God may have acted *contra naturam*, we can perhaps infer what William sees as the most important positive result of foregoing the shortcut of divine omnipotence, following instead the roundabout but slowly progressive approach embodied in his own study of nature. For William, only by toiling through the vagaries of *natura operans* can we really be able to detect the reason why something is so. What is more, in his eyes human reasoning naturally coincides with God's reason. More and more, it appears that for William divine creation and human rational reconstruction are actually identical.

Throughout the entire *Dragmaticon*, one can hardly fail to observe how critical William is of his students and his fellow-teachers, none of whom he appears to hold in high esteem. Students have more in their backpacks than in their minds, so he thinks, and are teachers not mostly after money and prestige? In the final chapter of his book, which is a chapter *On Education* (VI.27), he at last gives us the positive counterpart of his criticism, as he unfolds what seems to be his philosophy of teaching. His love for syzygies and respect for the labors of reason nicely come together, when he states:

Although the sanguine complexion is suitable for learning since it is temperate in everything, one can attain perfection in any complexion through hard work, because obstinate labor conquers all.⁷⁵

It was clearly William's temperament—unlike Abelard's, which will be the focus of our next chapter—not to depend on *ingenium* alone. Perhaps an experienced teacher never can. As a scientist, moreover, he would have held that only humans are created with a sanguine temperament or humor for learning, as according to his theory of humors, on this point Adam clearly transcends the beasts, which can

⁷⁴ *Dragmaticon* III.2.8, CCCM 152: 60, trans. Ronca/Curr, 40.

⁷⁵ *Dragmaticon* VI.27.4, CCCM 152: 272, trans. Ronca/Curr, 174. Cf. Vergil, *Georgics* I.145.

never be sanguine.⁷⁶ As a skilled teacher, however, he likewise knew that the laborious process of human reasoning would just never come to an end, especially not since humans had left paradise. Life's scientific project is thus inevitably linked to a moral or pedagogical one for this grammarian,⁷⁷ to whom the teaching of others included that the teacher himself continues to proceed along the painful and circuitous road of self-discovery. This made him conclude that the end of learning, simply, is death: *Terminus uero doctrinae est mors*. Witty as always, however, for a true teacher also needs to be entertaining in order to be effective, he cannot resist adding a little joke:

The end of learning is nothing but death. So, when a certain learned man was asked at what point in life learning should end, he replied: 'When life itself ends'. Another one, a philosopher, while he was dying in his nineties, asked by a pupil whether he regretted death, answered: 'Yes, I regret it'. As the other asked, 'Why?', he replied, 'Because now I was just beginning to learn'.⁷⁸

William's project is one in which the sciences of the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* would truly be combined in a lasting vision. It is not so much the story of how he was able to further the different achievements of either, but rather his keen eye for their natural connection that is most striking. In any good curriculum, the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* need to be conjoined and form a syzygy. The *ordo discendi* William herewith proposes was a long and winding one, though, which may explain why it was never truly realized. But at least he

⁷⁶ See Klibansky e.a., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 102–111, who credits philosophers like William, rather than experts in clinical medicine, for a revival of the real doctrine of the temperaments, as he comes to distinguish between the choleric, the phlegmatic and the *homo sanguineus*. One might see William's *Adam sanguineus* as his scientific translation of the biblical characterization of *imago dei*. For William, Adam's fall resulted in a contamination and degeneration of his original sanguine temperament, as a result of which the other temperaments could also spread among mankind.

⁷⁷ Just as in my opinion one cannot separate scientific from biblical or literary interpretation in William, so it seems one should not isolate the process of character formation in William from his overall scientific project. Hence the statement in Klibansky e.a., *Saturn and Melancholy*, p. 103, that 'William does not yet distinguish the four humors characterologically but only physiognomically' seems likewise beside the point.

⁷⁸ *Dragmaticon* VI.27.4, CCCM 152: 272; trans. Ronca/Curr, 174. Ronca/Curr suggest that this anecdote may stem from Theophrastus, by way of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. See for comparable reflections, *Tusculan Disputations* III.69.

left us a valuable sketch of its contours: via the study of eloquence, consisting of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric, students were to proceed to the study of philosophy. The study of philosophy, then, consisted first of the *quadrivium*: arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy, after which the study of the divine page completed the student's path. Despite and underneath this educationional trajectory, it remained true for William, even at the end of his career, that knowledge of creation eventually leads to knowledge of the creator. Precisely on the point of this final *conjunctio*, however, he appears to have been fatefully misunderstood.

V Conclusion

At the end of this chapter I like to summarize William's accomplishment by way of a short conclusion. For purposes of this summary I want to return briefly to the virulent criticism of William of St. Thierry. It is easy to dismiss the latter's criticism of his Norman namesake as beside the point, especially since a reading of his letter to Bernard of Clairvaux makes clear that he utterly failed to notice the most threatening implications of this new and more scientific world view.⁷⁹ Yet it seems that underneath this controversy Christian thought found itself at an important crossroads. While Eriugena in the ninth century, but also Anselm of Canterbury in the late eleventh, could still join faith and understanding in an almost seamless manner, it seems that in the course of the twelfth century the spontaneity of this alliance became more and more strained. Concomitantly, an ever-widening gap began to separate the realm of rational understanding from that of faith. As the criticism of William of St. Thierry makes clear, 'faith' became increasingly associated with the fundamental certainty of things unseen,⁸⁰ which were regarded as per-

⁷⁹ William of St. Thierry's criticism is directed predominantly against William of Conches' view of the Trinity and his account of the creation of Adam and Eve. It has been widely observed that his anti-heretical campaign overlooked the radical implications of William of Conches' astronomical theory, which holds that the universe and human life are radically influenced by the stars and the movement of the planets.

⁸⁰ William of St. Thierry criticizes Abelard's definition of faith as *existimatio* (hence: not certainty) *rerum non apparentium* on precisely this point. See S.C. Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University. The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100–1215* (Stanford:

taining exclusively to the corporeal life of Christ and its sacramental meaning,⁸¹ against which reason was seen as the aggressive instrument of unwanted opinion. Contrary to this, however, it appears that for twelfth-century thinkers like William the meaning of 'reason' was still much more tentative and provisional, providing them with the heuristic tool of an imaginative hermeneutics rather than the positivist certainty of science. Reason's task in the disciplines of the *quadrivium* was seen as reaching for an understanding by means of a rational inquiry into the vastness of reality, a reality that included invisible causes but did not impose fixed ends. The aim of these natural scholars was to broaden the Christian outlook on the universe sufficiently so as to include scientific dimensions previously unexplored. Yet by integrating the budding interest in notions like probability and scientific calculation with their conception of rational inquiry, they revealed before all how for them science was still an art.

Against this somewhat schematic background of the cultural climate around the middle of the twelfth century, the fact that William of Conches assigned Plato and his *Timaeus* a pivotal role on his own scientific path towards a rational investigation of nature alerts us to the literary and imaginative impulse that underlies his scientific views. By coupling the view of Plato as the philosopher of invisible reality with the familiar view of the master of fable and myth who simultaneously soothes and stimulates the human mind, Chartrians like William reveal to us that their cosmology is as much an exercise in meaning and form by which to hone human interpretive skills as a quest for certitude. After all, the trademark of human speculation about the world for William was verisimilitude.⁸²

Stanford University Press, 1985), 73. Cf. the definition of Hebr. 11:1 (Vg.): *Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium*.

⁸¹ William of St. Thierry rejects the metaphorical interpretation of the creation of Eve *ex costa* on sacramental grounds. In his opinion William of Conches denies the analogy between the birth of Eve and the birth of the Church from Christ's lateral wound on the cross by rejecting the literal truth of Genesis. After all, the blood and water that flow from Christ's wound on the cross represent the sacrament of the Eucharist, where wine is mixed with water. See Leclercq, 'Les lettres de Guillaume de Saint-Thierry à Saint Bernard,' 390, lines 298–302.

⁸² Just as the certainty of the divine can only be known in the next life (see above n. 42), so the human knowledge of God and the world in this life can never be more than verisimilitude. See e.g. *Glosae super Platonem* § XLVII, ed. Jeaneau, 115: 'Inasmuch as reasons that are probable and not necessary about the world suffice, therefore, you should not be surprised if I do not say 'through all things necessary'. This we have learned from Plato, that nothing must be said about God

While the study of the *quadrivium* was beginning to take off, the *trivium* was also undergoing significant changes. By the middle of the twelfth century it seemed the divergence of reason and faith, or of Nature and Scripture, and the simultaneous yielding of Plato to Aristotle's *logica nova* in what was to become a scholastic change of authorities was just beginning to get underway. Hugh of St. Victor's distinction between *opus conditionis* and *opus restaurationis* seems to foreshadow the imminent crack in *natura operans*.⁸³ Yet the welcome, and in many ways much needed progress such changes would bring about in the area of philosophical and theological speculation, threatened to undermine at the same time the former quest to strive for a successful union of art and science. It is the particular achievement of William of Conches that, due to his careful reading of Plato's *Timaeus*, which is exemplified in his glosses, solidified in his *Philosophia* only to come alive in the *Dragmaticon*, he was able to leave us a lasting vista of what this constructive blend of art and science truly looked like.

except what is true and necessary but about bodies what seems probable to us, even though the situation could be different'.

⁸³ See Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis*, Prol. 2, PL 176: 183B: *Ergo opus creationis est creatio mundi cum omnibus elementis suis. Opus restaurationis est incarnatio Verbi cum omnibus sacramentis suis; sive iis quae praecesserunt ab initio saeculi, sive iis quae subsequuntur usque ad finem mundi* ('Therefore, the work of foundation is the creation of the world together with all its elements. The work of restoration is the incarnation of the Word with all its sacraments, be it those that have gone before from the beginning of time or those that follow until the end of the world'). For Hugh the work of restoration is the exclusive subject of Scripture. Cf. also W. Otten, 'The Parallelism of Nature and Scripture: Reflections on Eriugena's Incarnational Exegesis,' in: G. van Riel, C. Steel and J. McEvoy (eds), *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena. The Bible and Hermeneutics* (Leuven, 1996), 93–96 ('The Divergence of the Natural and Scriptural Narrative in the Twelfth Century').

CHAPTER FOUR

OPENING THE MIND: PETER ABELARD AND THE MAKEOVER OF TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY

I *The Incident: Talent versus Tradition*

The incident with which this chapter begins is found in Abelard's famous autobiographical letter which has come down to us as the *Historia calamitatum*, that remarkable text revealing how vindication and self-incrimination are two sides of the same literary coin. With this incident Abelard has cleverly immortalized himself to posterity as the typical obnoxious and overly self-confident student, whose audacity went so far as to challenge an established teacher for the sole purpose of showing off his own intellectual precocity. By singling out the respected Anselm of Laon as target for his criticism, Abelard manifests how his failure to connect with any of his masters' teachings is in fact structural. Even more unsettling, however, is his readiness to discard the weight of the entire Christian tradition, of which the teaching of Anselm of Laon is a mere case in point. Judging from Abelard's conduct during this incident, he easily qualifies for the title of the most troublesome quarrel monger in medieval theology. By this I mean to stress that, whether or not these and other incidents really happened, Abelard has outlined his account in such a way that it is designed above all to foreshadow or rather, to shed retroactive light upon his later condemnation at the council of Soissons in 1121. Before adopting a negative reader's report on Abelard's student manners as all but inevitable, inasmuch as his account is the product of authorial intent, let me briefly recount how it is recorded in the *Historia*.¹

¹ See *Historia calamitatum*, ed. Monfrin (Paris, ²1962), lines 164–221. In what follows the translations of the HC are mostly taken from B. Radice, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (Harmondsworth, 1974), 57–106. The most recent complete study of Peter Abelard is Michael T. Clanchy, *Peter Abelard. A Medieval Life* (Oxford, 1997). For a short survey of his life and works, see also C.J. Mews, *Peter Abelard. Historical and Religious Writers of the Latin West: Authors of the Middle Ages 5* (Aldershot, 1995), 9–43.

As he tells us himself, already as a young man Abelard decided to exchange the weapons of the military for the armor of logic. Yet this decision only spurred him on to engage in substantial dialectical combat with Roscelinus of Compiègne. His next opponent after coming to Paris was the Notre Dame logician and theologian William of Champeaux, whom Abelard forced to modify his position on universals, after which William forced him out of his classroom. At this point Abelard decided to undertake the study of theology, as he transferred to Laon to attend the lectures of the well-known master Anselm there. Together with his brother Ralph, Anselm had built up the reputation of its cathedral school beyond anything the town had ever seen before. Hereafter the *Historia* recounts the famous incident. For Anselm only teaches him disappointment, displaying what Abelard calls a 'remarkable command of words, but their meaning was worthless and devoid of all sense'.² Full of wit as was his style, for when he met Anselm he was already a trained dialectician, Abelard quickly loses interest in his master's lectures, ridiculing them by his conspicuous absence.

With his class visits becoming ever less frequent, Abelard's classmates begin playing their own part in this miniature classroom drama. Thus we see them engaged in the usual student effrontery as they ask him, the slightly older and more mature student who is a newcomer to theology, if he perhaps thinks that he can do a better job. To their astonishment Abelard answers in the affirmative. Having already professed that anyone can study Scripture with the aid of a commentary, thereby disqualifying the role of the master as essentially superfluous,³ he proves ready to accept the challenge implied in his fellow students' questions, agreeing to act as their teacher. The students select a difficult passage from the prophet Ezekiel on which they ask him to comment. Immediately Abelard consents.⁴ Caught

² See *Historia calamitatum*, lines 169–70: *Verborum usum habebat mirabilem, sed sensum contentibilem et ratione vacuum*. One cannot but think back to a similar disappointment experienced by Augustine when he at last came to meet the famous Manichaean teacher Faustus, as recounted in *Confessiones* V.III.3–VII.13, ed. Verheijen, CCSL 27: 58–64.

³ See *HC* 192–95; trans. Radice, p. 63: '... but that I found it most surprising that for educated men the writings or glosses of the Fathers themselves were not sufficient for interpreting their commentaries without further instruction.'

⁴ Unfortunately, the text of Abelard's commentary on Ezekiel has not been preserved. In the opening of his *Hexaemeron*-commentary Abelard calls Genesis, which

off guard in their jocular mood, the students advise him to defer his lecture by a few days, so that he will have more time to prepare. Yet Abelard insists that he will only agree to lecture the very next day, adding indignantly that . . . 'it is my custom to proceed through talent (*ingenium*) rather than tradition (*usus*)'.⁵

In privileging the role of *ingenium* or talent/ingenuity over that of tradition or (*longevus*) *usus* Abelard has led later generations to cast him in the role of the untimely harbinger of a rationalist and scholarly mentality whose time was yet to come.⁶ To the nineteenth century editor and commentator French interpreter Victor Cousin, Abelard and Descartes were the greatest philosophers ever produced by France. This may help us to understand why in his aftermath medieval theology in general but pre-scholastic theology in particular are often stereotyped as archaic business, its authors preferring the veneration of fossilized *auctoritas* over the use of supple and flexible *ratio*. Following such a scenario it seems easy to understand why this earlier theological approach, its range restricted to the narrow confines of an increasingly stifling paradigm, would soon become eclipsed by better intellectual models and methods. Lacking the intrinsic vitality to rejuvenate itself, this older approach eventually also lacked endurance. Hence Plato gave way to Aristotle and theology progressed to the universities, all of them developments that are unthinkable without the contribution of Peter Abelard, even if he may not quite have pushed far enough. For those espousing this position, which has a substantial amount of historical truth to it, Abelard's part is not so much that of a true rationalist *avant la lettre* as that of

recounts the history of divine creation (*operatio*), the Song of Songs, and the first and last vision of the prophecy of Ezekiel the three most difficult passages of the Old Testament. According to Jerome, these books were in the Jewish tradition to be read only at the priestly age of thirty. See *Expositio in Hexaemeron*, PL 178: 731A-B.

⁵ See HC 207–09; trans. Radice, p. 63: *Indignatus autem respondi non esse mee consuetudinis per usum proficere sed per ingenium* ('I replied indignantly that it was not my custom to benefit from practice, but I relied on my own intelligence'). Note how Abelard sees himself as diametrically opposed to Anselm of Laon, whom he had earlier (cf. HC 164–65; trans. Radice, p. 62) described as follows: *Accessi igitur ad hunc senem, cui magis longevus usus quam ingenium vel memoria nomen comparaverat* ('I therefore approached this old man, who owed his reputation more to long practice than to intelligence or memory').

⁶ See the appendix on Abelard as a 'critical thinker' in J. Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge, 1997), 341–49.

an intellectual catalyst. Reaching far beyond the scholastic movement, at the beginning of which he nevertheless stands, he points straight ahead to the culture of modernity, embodying its finest qualities in an attractive combination of rational intelligence and romantic heroism.

II *Turning Incident into Argument*

As a preamble to my argument in this chapter I would like to state that Abelard's privileging of *ingenium* over (*longevus*) *usus* does not in itself indicate a departure from the early medieval theological tradition. Nor from the patristic one, for that matter. In Anselm of Canterbury we have the example of an early medieval author who was guided by his own *ingenium* at least to the same extent, if not far more. By refusing to build his famous argument on testimonial support from either Scripture or from the Church Fathers, Anselm follows a much more daring course in the *Proslogion*, written after his less provocative *Monologion*, than Abelard ever would.⁷ After all, not only Abelard's *Sic et Non* but also his various 'Theologies', ranging from the early *Theologia* '*Summi boni*', condemned at Soissons 1121, to the later *Theologia* '*Scholarium*', frequently call upon past authorities. Interestingly enough, Anselm appears to have been appreciated as a saint and scholar to a much greater degree than that he was understood.⁸ However that may be, he just was never quite perceived to be the same radical thinker as Abelard, which may be due to the fact that he was safely ensconced behind the walls of his Benedictine cloister for at least an important part of his career. The monastic ambience of Anselm's thought may have helped him also in another way, as his rational arguments can be construed in such a way as to revert back to an underlying spirituality of the human

⁷ See the prologue of his *Monologion* and his *Proslogion* respectively, ed. F.S. Schmitt, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1968), 7–8; 93–94. On Anselm's radical approach, see M.B. Pranger, '*Sic et non*: Patristic Authority between Refusal and Acceptance: Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux,' in: *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West. From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, ed. I. Backus (Leiden, 1997), Vol. I: 172–182.

⁸ On the medieval school as a utopian ideal, see M.B. Pranger, 'Anselm Misunderstood: Utopian Approaches Towards Learning in the Eleventh Century,' in: Josef Zunt and Vilém Herold (eds), *The European Dimension of St. Anselm's Thinking* (Prague, 1993), 163–189.

soul. Even though his method was strictly *sola ratione*, it was his faith that went out in search of understanding.⁹

By making the *Proslogion* a locus for the intimate meeting of God and the soul, Anselm actually points back much further, namely to the early Augustine. In the famous opening sequence of his *Soliloquia* we read how Augustine identifies God and the soul as the only two objects worthy of permanent attention.¹⁰ In the same early stages of his career, so overwhelmingly dominated by this intellectual quest for knowledge of God and the soul, we find Augustine remarkably alerting his students to the importance of *ingenium*. Exhorting them to cultivate their talent, he recommends that they not spend all day in books, as he wants to teach them to be with themselves, just thinking.¹¹ Abelard could thus claim a much longer history for his position than he may well have realized. If this is indeed true, he is neither unduly disrespectful of the tradition nor necessarily opposed to it, even though his bravado did not do him any favor.

II A. Ingenium

Building on the fact that the cultivation of *ingenium* has roots in the tradition of patristic and early medieval theology which are traceable and dignified, this chapter will display a dual focus. First, we shall attempt to explore what precisely Abelard the theologian wants to convey to us by contrasting *ingenium* with *longevus usus*. His preference for *ingenium* signals more than a proud, even stubborn, determination to rely on indigenous wit, as it hints at the emergence of a methodical, if not methodological, doubt permeating and threatening the certainty of all human knowledge. After all, Abelard has duly become famous for coining the distinctive motto of early scholastic theology, whereby doubt leads to inquiry, which in turn yields truth. *Dubitando quippe ad inquisitionem venimus, inquirendo veritatem percipimus*.¹² It is this other aspect of Abelard's *ingenium*, its quality of

⁹ See *Proslogion. Prooemium*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, vol. 1, 93–94 (*fides quaerens intellectum*). See also *Cur Deus Homo* II.22, ed. F.S. Schmitt, vol. 2, 133 (*sola ratione*).

¹⁰ See *Soliloquia* I.II.7, ed. W. Hörmann, CSEL 89:11 (*Deum et animam scire cupio*).

¹¹ See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo. A Biography* (London, 1967), 120, with references to *Contra academicos* II.VII.17 and *De ordine* I.III.6.

¹² See *Prologus in Sic et Non*, in: Blanche B. Boyer and R. McKeon (eds), *Peter Abailard. Sic et Non. A Critical Edition* (Chicago, 1976–77), 103 lines 338–39.

methodical subversion, which this chapter on 'Opening the mind' wants to analyze as well.

But there is still more to Abelard's decision to take *ingenium* as his principal guide in all intellectual matters, including the business of doing theology. Rather than reflecting any kind of mental reservation, Abelard's doubt reflects in my opinion a deeper structural or innate thought-pattern. In conformity with this, the prominent role assigned to *ingenium* is important not just because it helps him to concentrate on his own philosophical and theological views, but also because it lays bare the deeper fault-lines of his thought undergirding even his most logical language. In this respect it is significant that Abelard's doubt, even when presented in its most methodological form, always retains a trace of self-doubt, a self-doubt which is all the more striking because it seems so unlike him. In its radical unexpectedness, Abelard's self-doubt forms the exact counterpart to his egregious arrogance of which it is at the same time an undercurrent. To demonstrate what I mean we may compare Abelard's doubt briefly to that displayed by Montaigne in his *Essais*, representing the mindset of an early modern author. In Montaigne, the Socratic attitude of doubting all inherited and traditional knowledge leads him to an undeniable, be it not necessarily stable, sense of self, which he nonetheless embraces as the only fall-back position that is intellectually valid. As such it needs to become habitual in the human person, especially in the self-conscious writer.¹³ In contrast, it seems as if Abelard's arguments, even when they hold up in the face of much critical scrutiny, are marked by an underlying uncertainty. As I will try to point out, this reflects how, underneath his logical exercises, Abelard seems to be pursuing a rather different course as well, as he ultimately aims at embracing truth rather than merely defining it.¹⁴

¹³ See A. Nehamas, *The Art of Living. Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley, 1998), 101–27. See especially the reference to Montaigne's *Of practice*: 'What I write here is not my teaching, but my study; it is not a lesson for others, but for me . . .' (101). There is a sense in which this is true for Abelard as well, even though he has not yet made the transition from the cultivation of *ingenium* to the care of the self in the way Montaigne did. Nevertheless, it is true that Abelard's teaching is always, and perhaps even primarily, also his study.

¹⁴ In his important recent study of Abelard, John Marenbon sees a break between Abelard as a logician and Abelard as a theologian which came about as a result of his conversion to monastic life. Whereas I think this break cannot be so easily

Using the case of Peter Abelard as an illustrative example, this chapter on 'opening the mind' thus wants to disclose how the twelfth century's ideas of intellectual expansion, *ad extra* and *ad intra*, contain inherent paradoxes. Distinct from but not unrelated to the process of opening the universe which we discussed before, the movement of 'opening the mind' points first of all to the general broadening of mental horizons yielding such exciting new epistemological and theological models. I call this the element of opening the mind *ad extra*.¹⁵ Yet to halt our analysis there would be to overlook how such advances had grave 'introspective' repercussions. Apart from leading Abelard and others to autobiographical doubt,¹⁶ they produce a changed sense of tradition, of which the feeling of self-doubt may only be one aspect.¹⁷ This is the element of 'opening the mind' *ad intra*. In an attempt to capture both aspects at the same time, the phrase 'opening the mind' reveals in the end how Abelard opened up a new space in his works by confronting rather than ignoring humanity's intrinsic inadequacy, even if this would lead him to think

formally located, I do acknowledge a similar kind of rupture affecting and undermining Abelard's thought. Instead of associated with a formal career move, however, I see it as a structural element of Abelard's thought that also relates to other intellectual developments in the twelfth century on which this book comments. See J. Marenbon, *Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, 94–95.

¹⁵ In this respect we should also refer to Gilbert of Poitiers whose work I have not included in this study. On Gilbert, see the important study of L.O. Nielsen, *Theology and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century. A Study of Gilbert Porreta's Thinking and the Theological Expositions of the Doctrine of the Incarnation during the Period 1130–1180* (Leiden, 1982).

¹⁶ Next to Abelard's letters, especially the *Historia calamitatum*, the other important twelfth-century autobiographical document based more specifically on Augustine's *Confessions* is Guibert of Nogent's *Monodiae* or *De vita sua*, dated 1115. For a translation and commentary, see J.F. Benton, *Self and Society in Medieval France* (1970; Toronto, 1984).

¹⁷ On the role of doubt in Abelard, see W. Otten, 'The Bible and the Self in Medieval Autobiography: Otloh of St. Emmeram (1010–1070) and Peter Abelard (1079–1142),' in: D.E. Aune and J. McCarthy (eds), *The Whole and Divided Self. The Bible and Theological Anthropology* (New York, 1997) 130–57, esp. 138–48. See more broadly, Nehamas on Montaigne's connection between self-knowledge and the awareness of the limits of one's powers, *Art of Living*, 106–07. Unfortunately, Nehamas skips the medieval period, as is often the case with contemporary philosophical studies that include historical surveys. The same is true for Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989), who goes from Augustine to Descartes. A helpful concept to mediate the gap between the modern and the medieval sense of self is Peter von Moos' notion of *Selbstexemplum*. See his *Geschichte als Topik. Das rhetorische Exemplum von der Antike zur Neuzeit und die historiae im "Polycraticus" Johannis von Salisbury* (Hildesheim, 1988) s.v. *Selbstexemplum*.

against the grain, that is, against the scholastic tradition surrounding him, as I think it did.

By maintaining that a sense of human inadequacy necessarily underlies even one's most superior handling of logical or theological terms, his works communicate to us how humanity is profoundly marked by frailty, a frailty which in the final analysis can only be deemed the tragic consequence of sin.¹⁸ Just as the other thinkers treated in this study, each in their own way, were all trying to counteract on the effects of human sin, Abelard proves to be similarly involved in his own journey back to paradise, even if he proceeds more by theological than cosmological means. This deep-seated feeling of sinful inadequacy in Abelard, even when in theological terms it is masked as a kind of intellectual impairment humans should try to overcome, can help us to lay bare the structural underpinnings of Abelard's thought. For this we will connect his 'Theologies' both to his *Exposition on the Hexameron*, in which he comments on Genesis' creation story, and to his *Ethics*, to which we will come back in a following chapter. In an interesting twist, it appears the problem of human self-knowledge is explicitly thematized in all of these as it represents a kind of knowledge which is on the one hand of the most volatile kind, while serving on the other as an ever-flowing fount of wisdom.

II B. Longevus usus

The above pertains only to the first dimension of this chapter's dual focus on the problem of *ingenium* versus *longevus usus*. By anchoring *ingenium* ultimately in a deeper deficiency of the human self, both morally and intellectually, Abelard seems to endow his own reasoning with a kind of endemic inadequacy which thwarts any and all attempt to see his intellectual contribution as monolithic.¹⁹ The sec-

¹⁸ In this regard Abelard may reveal more affinity with his chief opponent Bernard of Clairvaux than has often been thought. See on this M.B. Pranger, 'Elective Affinities: Love, Hatred, Playfulness and the Self in Bernard and Abelard,' in: St. Gersh and B. de Roest (eds), *Medieval and Renaissance Humanism. Rhetoric, Representation and Reform* (Leiden, 2003), 55–72.

¹⁹ While Marenbon shows a sensitivity to a kind of break in Abelard's thought, his study ultimately aims at giving a wholesale analysis based on an evaluation of the net result of Abelard's ideas. In my view the apparent break in Abelard's thought

ond dimension relates more directly to the danger of intellectual overconfidence, which we already noted in the case of William of Conches. As in the case of William, we will need to see what grounds there are, if any, to follow Abelard in holding his *ingenium* ultimately responsible for the heresy charges hurled against him. Thus we should try to find out what provoked Abelard's legendary outbursts at his opponents, be they masters or peers, and what caused the polemical reaction of many of his contemporaries in return, as they simply dismissed him as a 'heretical innovator'. To solve this problem, we do best to probe further into the question how Abelard, building on the examples of Augustine and Anselm before him, saw the connection between talent and tradition. It is clear that they were closely related for him, but in such a way—and here Abelard is, if not new, then certainly more outspoken than any of his predecessors—that it was left up to the human mind not just to make the connection, but to clarify it at the same time in a kind of second order discourse.²⁰ Throughout all this it appears that Abelard is far from wishing to dismiss the tradition out of hand. Rather, he seems actively involved in trying to found it anew by giving it a firm theoretical basis. His aim is to integrate the horizontal consistency of human logic not just with the diachronic element preserved in the *longevus usus* of the Christian tradition but also with the vertical transcendence of the divine.

By striving hard to include the divine in his logic also,²¹ to the point of desiring so profoundly, Abelard alerts us again to the problem of humanity's final inadequacy. This may explain why even in

reveals a kind of inadequacy of Abelard's thought which permanently resists such an evaluation.

²⁰ In this regard Abelard is very different from Anselm, whose discursive method of *sola ratione* never reveals any fissure with the prayerful order of faith. Instead, Abelard's approach appears to be much closer to Eriugena's procedure in his *Periphyseon*, which opens with the Ciceronian quotation: *saepe mihi cogitanti* . . . indicating self-reflection alongside reflection.

²¹ This is beautifully expressed by Marenbon, *Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, 218: 'For Abelard, by contrast, God is indeed the highest good and, as such, a far greater good than any created thing. But—in spite of what he says on some occasions about words changing their meaning when applied to the divinity, and in spite of his describing divine goodness as 'ineffable'—his underlying assumption is of there being a common measure between God's goodness and that of other things'. These two chapters on Abelard in the present study try to bring out how Abelard proceeds in order to achieve this.

his most logical exercises his language still reveals elements of the metaphorical. The issue of human inadequacy makes itself felt in Abelard's thought on another point as well, as this time he broaches the question from the opposite direction, namely from the angle of goodness, which is the divine attribute *par excellence*. Obviously, goodness is a human attribute also, given that humanity is created in God's image, but human beings clearly fail to realize their calling. The message Abelard seems to be sending us on this point is a very different one from what he states on other occasions. Just as humanity will always be sinful, given that Adam was created in paradise only to find himself expelled from it, so Abelard finally holds that God as the highest good must always be merciful, even if at times his justice can lead him to punish us. Representing the essence of Christian teaching from Augustine onward, the message of divine goodness informing human goodness as such is soundly traditional. But this is not how Abelard goes about it, as he adds an incisive sense of urgency. He does so not by changing the message, although he was twice accused of that, but by questioning the adequacy of its promulgation in the conventional views of the Christian tradition. For Abelard it is clear that God, as the principle of goodness who instills both love and fear in humanity, can never be a mere object of study. Consequently, it is clear that the divine, even when approached analytically, must always evoke a response from us whose interior nature transcends the formal rules of logic. In the same way, in his ethical thinking Abelard will never be satisfied with formal obedience.

In the end the question how the desire for a better life binds God and human beings together as partners in a single project, may well be the most fundamental and exciting mystery underlying Abelard's entire intellectual project. As such it takes him far beyond issues of appropriate scholastic analysis, of personal morality and ecclesial penitence, as he wants to see it all the way through to the realm of divine predestination and providence. While he settles other relevant theological questions along the way, such as the meaning of incarnation and the effect of grace, divine providence provides him with the grand scheme under which he wants to give a new and comprehensive survey of the Christian tradition. It is under this aegis that the entire corpus of his own thought stands united.

II C. *Debating the Divine*

When pointing above to this chapter's dual focus, I purposely avoided calling it a double one. The reason for this strategy lies in the fact that, as an early medieval thinker, Abelard saw the intellectual and the moral, the traditional and the original, or even the human and the divine not (yet) as two distinct spheres of influence. If you only think clearly enough, so he seems to imply, the reasons behind God's mercy will ultimately become transparent, with their very transparency intimating that his mercy might extend to you as well. Although at the end of Abelard's career he could no longer utter such statements with the same frankness as early on, as the development of scholasticism ironically seemed to produce a less intellectually open theological climate, there is no evidence that he ever really gave up this position. It rather appears as if he continued to deepen and develop it, thus presenting us with the paradoxical picture of a thinker who was using scholastic resources and honing scholastic tools to think somehow against the scholastic grain. In the same way, Abelard also suggests that, if one's actions are but well-intentioned enough, as they must be accompanied by the requisite amount of penitence, the structure of reality cannot fail to make sense, after which one merely adds to its persuasion by spelling this out. Thus the goal of Christian history cannot fail to be disclosed to all its interpreters, be they philosophers, moral thinkers or theologians, with ever more clarity. It is Abelard's strong conviction, bordering on faith, not only that such widely diverging spheres of influence, the intellectual and the moral alongside the human and the divine, can be reconciled, but that this must be done. This latter point, the idea that the human and the divine must be integrated, gives Abelard's thinking in the end a peculiarly high risk factor. This explosive nature of his thought goes far to explain why his contribution provoked such vehement reactions. To these it appears he eventually succumbed, as he was condemned first at Soissons in 1121 and a second time at the council at Sens in 1141.²²

²² In a recent article Constant Mews has defended this date for the Council of Sens instead of the more conventional one of 1140. See C.J. Mews, 'The Council of Sens (1141): Abelard, Bernard and the Fear of Social Upheaval,' *Speculum* 77 (2002): 342–82. For further biographical details relating to the councils, see Clanchy, *Abelard*, *passim*.

In my opinion, it was the radical nature of Abelard's thinking rather than its daring doctrinal contents or his equally daring life which constitute the greatest challenge to his twelfth-century context, of whose breadth he is in many other respects an exemplary representative. Yet his thought seemed to open the human mind as it had not been opened before, pushing through to where the relentless reconstruction of human reason, permeated as it is by a deep sense of its final inadequacy, comes hauntingly close to baring the weakness of divine creation itself. While Abelard's innovative line of thinking harbors unheard of possibilities, as a result of its high risk quality it also runs the risk of falling totally flat, as if collapsing under the weight of the daring vista it had just started to unfold. From a historical perspective, the high risk factor of his thought marks Abelard's intellectual achievement most powerfully. If this is indeed so, we cannot merely content ourselves with enumerating the net worth of his ideas without embedding them in a much broader picture listing all the stakes that were involved.²³ Consequently, we should try to canvass the entire intellectual spectrum of Abelard's theology: its integration of the human and the divine, its moral qualities, its shifting of linguistic boundaries, not as different projects but as aspects of a single journey.

To do so means that conventional historiographical models no longer apply. Soon after Abelard the theological approach known as scholasticism changed the prime attribute of the divine from *summum bonum* to *summum esse*, thereby ushering in the end of these kinds of comprehensive moral-intellectual projects altogether. As a result of the scholastic makeover, Abelard is mostly approached as a forerunner, one whose thought belonged to the future, even the future beyond scholasticism, rather than to the twelfth-century present. His important contributions to the areas of logic and ethics are most often seen as belonging to separate fields of study instead of being treated as ingredients of an inclusive whole. In conformity with the thesis of this book, the compartmentalized reception of Abelard may well mark the surest of signs that a more humanist approach to theology had indeed come to an end. Obviously my reading of Abelard wants to point in a different direction, integrating him with the ear-

²³ This is where my approach differs from Marenbon's, on the grounds listed above in n. 18.

lier theologizing culture. Whether or not on the basis of his Trinitarian and other interpretations which so favor *ingenium* over tradition there still is some truth to the accusation that Abelard was the tradition's own worst enemy, will be a topic to which we shall return at the end of the next chapter.

III *When Talent Meets Trinity*

To push the dilemma of talent *versus* tradition further, we will examine Abelard's various *Theologiae*. The first of these is the *Theologia 'Summi boni'*, for which he was condemned at the council of Soissons in 1121. Although he was forced to throw it into the fire, he must have kept a copy, for he subsequently revised it, leaving much of the original argument intact. This later and much longer work became the well-known *Theologia christiana*. A reworking from a still later date became known as the *Theologia 'Scholarium'*. This later version was to be heavily criticized by Bernard of Clairvaux at the council of Sens in 1141.

In much clearer fashion than his at times sensationalist autobiography, Abelard's theological writings reveal the vicissitudes of a subtle theological mind which, in a time of rapid intellectual development, felt caught between respect for and dissatisfaction with the tradition he had inherited. I do not mean by this that Abelard was critical of tradition as such. Rather, it was his strong conviction that the current interpretation of Christian tenets needed to be overhauled. His aim was to enhance the essence of traditional teaching by adjusting its methods of reception. Beside illustrating his specific contribution, a closer look at Abelard's various 'Theologies' can give us a more nuanced perspective of what I mean when referring to the demise of early medieval theology. No longer content with the uncritical integration of worldly and divine knowledge, the nascent discipline of theology as practiced by early scholastics like Anselm of Laon was catapulted into the world of the twelfth-century renaissance, on its way to a promising academic future. In many respects Abelard's *ingenium* made him a likely player in all this, as he admirably shows in the introduction to his *Sic et Non*,²⁴ yet contrary to what

²⁴ See *Prologus Petri Abelardi in Sic et Non*, ed. McKeon, 89–104.

one might expect, his underlying intentions may reveal him to be more a man of Eriugenian stature after all.²⁵ While laboring away at the mastering of various individual disciplines in which he sought perfection, his subtle mind still wanted to encompass all, including the divine, in one giant sweep. The unusual way in which his own intellectual maturation unfolded proves only the first source of controversy in this regard, as he came to theology at a later age, having established himself as a qualified dialectician. Also as a dialectician, however, he had refused to stay within the bounds of this one discipline alone.

Prior to our analysis, I want to make it clear that in what follows we shall deal with Abelard's various 'Theologies' as constituting a single intellectual edifice in the making, even if this building's actual construction never got quite beyond the planning stage. It was Abelard's usual style to work out his thoughts through the writing of different drafts that built on each other. As a result his arguments seem to spill over from one work to another, while the works themselves are never finished. In the case of the *Theologia* '*Summi boni*', for example, it is not even clear that Abelard selected a name for this work, as his *Historia* merely speaks about 'a theological treatise about divine unity and trinity' (*quendam theologie tractatum de unitate et trinitate divina*).²⁶ While it is indeed true that Abelard employed the term *Theologia christiana*, he may later have shortened it to the simple *Theologia*. This *Theologia* is the work which, in line with accepted scholarly practice, we now commonly refer to as *Theologia* '*Scholarium*'.

Regarding Abelard's understanding of theology as a field of study, Constant Mews has argued that he adopted its Boethian meaning, with theology pertaining primarily to a reasoned discourse about the

²⁵ For an interesting comparison between Eriugena's and Abelard's methodology in judging patristic evidence, see G. d'Onofrio, 'The *Concordia* of Augustine and Dionysius: Toward a Hermeneutic of the Disagreement of Patristic Sources in John the Scot's *Periphyseon*', in: B. McGinn and W. Otten (eds), *Eriugena: East and West* (Notre Dame, 1994), 115–40. Whereas d'Onofrio sees Abelard and Eriugena as substantially different, he interestingly detects in Eriugena an intent to design his own methodological approach for establishing consensus (*machinari consensum*).

²⁶ See *HC* 690–95, trans. Radice, 68: 'Now it happened that I first applied myself to lecturing on the basis of our faith by analogy with human reason, and composed a theological treatise *On the Unity and Trinity of God* for the use of my students who were asking for human and logical reasons, and demanded something intelligible rather than mere words'.

divine nature rather than about the benefits flowing from God for humanity.²⁷ Be that as it may, we should keep in mind that for Abelard—in contrast to a later thinker like Aquinas—such distinctions were merely a matter of perspective. In the first half of the twelfth century theological discourse was still embedded in an unbroken encyclopedic and metaphorical frame, even if the first cracks started to become visible. Thus we should not be too rash in isolating the moral and soteriological aspects from the more philosophical lines of argument in Abelard. This observation allows us to understand why Abelard can still speak about the incarnation in his *Theologia* ‘*Scholarium*’, for example, having treated it already in his *Commentary on Romans*. It rather seems as if, starting with the *Theologia* ‘*Summi boni*’, he is increasingly interested in extending, or rather, expanding his discourse about the divine in such a way as to make it more inclusive, encompassing both the fate of humanity and the divinely ordered cosmos at the same time. This may also be the reason why he chose to incorporate a long excursion on God’s ability to save humans in what was to become his last theology, the so-called *Scholarium*.

In reading Abelard’s various ‘Theologies’, the *Theologia* ‘*Summi boni*’, the *Theologia christiana* and what was formerly called the *Introduction to Theology* or *Theologia* ‘*Scholarium*’, one is as much dazzled by the sharpness of ideas as simultaneously confused by Abelard’s apparent lack of organization. Rather than following a careful pre-designed structure, of which he was intellectually more than capable even if temperamentally he was not, Abelard’s arguments seem to develop in strands. Thus we find him putting forth logical arguments about the various divine attributes and about the inconsistency of applying them arbitrarily to the divine persons. Similarly, we may find him delving into ancient philosophy to adduce Plato’s arguments about the World Soul and to relate these with great precision to the

²⁷ On the title *theologia*, see the general introduction by C.J. Mews to *Petri Abelardi Opera Theologica* III, CCCM 13:19: ‘Although Abaelard never defines the word, it seems that he understood *theologia* to be discourse about the divine nature rather than about the incarnation or any other benefit which flowed from God’. See also his article ‘The Development of the *Theologia* of Peter Abelard,’ in: R. Thomas e.a. (ed.), *Petrus Abaelardus (1079–1142). Person, Werk und Wirkung*. Trierer Theologische Studien Bd. 38 (Trier, 1980), 183–98, repr. in C.J. Mews, *Abelard and his Legacy* (Aldershot, 2001).

Holy Spirit.²⁸ These different strands represent different tracks of his thought, as it were, whose reach may be extensive even when a conclusion is never reached, because Abelard fails to clarify their lateral connections. When putting these strands together, however, it seems that they form a tapestry in which a faint pattern can be detected. Underlying his 'Theologies' as a kind of intellectual substrate, it is this pattern which I here want to sketch.

At first sight the weaving of such a loose conceptual pattern seems in full accordance with the question-format that would soon come to dominate the academic discourse in theology and philosophy. Not surprisingly, the patch-work quality of Abelard's thought is mostly understood against this background. Yet the outward accordance of Abelard's works with scholastic method should not make us lose sight of the fact that underneath they display a barely concealed narrative thrust as well. Approaching his 'Theologies' from this perspective, we can pick up interesting clues. Abelard has not yet lost all touch with the journey back to paradise, so it appears, although he may present it as a profound intellectual apprehensiveness about the possibility of human salvation. Given the embryonic status of the question-format on the one hand and Abelard's intuitive desire to control his own narrative on the other, we should not expect his greatest strides to occur on the level of individual argument. Nor on the level of structural arrangement, for that matter, as this merely shows how he has mastered this art or the next, depending on whether we are dealing with logic, philosophy, or theology. Instead, his most articulate theological assertions as well as his most important conclusions are found precisely at the so-called knotty points, that is, at the intersections where his various strands of argument become so intertwined as to begin forming a pattern. If we wish to find out whether Abelard really defies traditional thought, therefore, instead of merely reshaping or transforming it, it is to these intellectual 'knots' that we need to go. Whatever the outcome, it will help us to follow Abelard as he actually confronts tradition.

While in the process of tying the various strands of argument in his 'Theologies' together, as he struggles to keep them thematically

²⁸ In an article on Abelard's use of the *Timaeus*, L. Moonan argues that Abelard uses the World Soul as an *involutum* or Enfolding Image precisely of the temporal mission of the Holy Spirit. See L. Moonan, 'Abelard's Use of the *Timaeus*,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 56 (1989): 7–90, esp. 56–72.

unified, Abelard has one single focus: to integrate the monotheistic truth of an omnipotent, omniscient and supremely benevolent God seamlessly with his manifestation as Trinity. Being the most sublime and poignant divine reality, the Trinity marks for Abelard all that is distinctive about the Christian religion. As such it poses the greatest intellectual challenge. As both his forebears Augustine and Boethius would testify, knowing the Trinity means by implication that one knows what Christianity is ultimately all about.²⁹ Once achieved, this knowledge can be extended to shed light on other problems in Christianity's self-understanding as well. By regarding the Trinity as the cornerstone of the Christian belief system, Abelard follows at first sight a rather conventional approach deriving from the creed. In the end, however, his systematic scrutiny results not only in a changed perspective on his Christian heritage, but in a radically changed approach to Christian and non-Christian traditions alike, as he strives hard to integrate both in an overarching picture. In the new and elaborate picture he sketches, he assigns a prominent place to Old Testament prophecy and to pagan philosophy alike. When we next go from his *Theologia 'Summi boni'* to the *Theologia christiana*, we find him not just broadening the historical warrants for Christianity even further but shoring up its intellectual consistency as well.

Still, in working on his 'Theologies', Abelard never really intended to go beyond the conventional horizons of institutional Christianity. He clearly respects it as much as he represents it, accepting even

²⁹ In Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, the Trinity is the only *res* worth knowing, compared to which all other things have the status of *signa*. See Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* I.V.5.10, ed. and trans. R. Green, 16–17: 'The things which are to be enjoyed, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity comprised by them, which is a kind of single, supreme thing, shared by all who enjoy it—if indeed it is a thing and not the cause of all things, and if indeed it is a cause'. See also Boethius, *De trinitate* I, ed. and trans. Rand (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 5–7: 'There are many who claim as theirs the dignity of the Christian religion; but that form of faith is most valid and only valid which, both on account of the universal character of the rules and doctrines through which the authority of that same religion is perceived, and because its form of worship has spread throughout almost all the world, is called catholic or universal. The belief of this faith concerning the Unity of the Trinity is as follows: "the Father" they say "is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God". Therefore, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, not three Gods. The cause of this union is absence of difference'.

the severest judgments against him passed by the ecclesiastical authorities.³⁰ This is not to say that they were ever capable of swaying him to alter his intellectual course. But after the condemnation of his first *Theologia* he evidently became more self-conscious about the prospect of an uphill battle, as he tried to anticipate potential criticism of his Trinitarian project. He incorporated more and more patristic references, for example, which reflect his maturity as a theologian at ease in the tradition. Notwithstanding these and other efforts at damage control, when the different strands of his Trinitarian argument finally came together, it seems that the resulting theological vision could hardly fail to impress its critical onlookers as an inexorable departure from tradition.

One of the prime reasons for confusion in understanding Abelard is his procedure of cataloguing every controversy as being either about *scriptum* or about *ratio*, as he faithfully clings to Cicero.³¹ His dealing with traditional authorities centers on the one hand around their 'scripted' or 'scriptural' quality, therefore, while on the other it revolves around their rational consistency. Being the trained logician that he is, Abelard does not hesitate to rephrase his authorities (*scriptum*) to bring out what they mean or to put forth his own opinion (*ratio*). As a consequence, his authorities slowly become absorbed into his own narrative. Instead of being embedded in a discourse that frames their arguments piecemeal, as was the practice of Anselm of Laon and the emerging scholastic tradition, they now form an integral part of it. As a result, it is exceedingly difficult to unravel traditional and original arguments and methods in Abelard. We find remarkable moments of 'knotty' reasoning, for example, when he sets out to elucidate the relations between the various persons of the Trinity. Despite using venerable authorities, this is primarily a conflict about *ratio* for him. The reason is not that he is unhappy with the tradition, although he is that too, but because he relates the divine persons to each other in such a way that they become players in

³⁰ This corresponds with Abelard's intent to scrutinize yet still accept the authority of canonical decisions. See Prologue, *Sic et Non*, ed. McKeon, p. 76.

³¹ See e.g. *Theologia christiana* III.1, ed. Buytaert, CCCM 12:194: *Cum omnis controversiae discussio aut in scripto aut in ratione uersetur et in eisdem terminetur, si huiusmodi est quae finem accipiat...* ('Since all controversial debate pivots around text or reason and is decided there, if it can receive closure...'), cf. Cicero, *De invent. rhetor.* II. 40.116.

his language game. To accommodate his centrifugal approach, he needs to reassess the historical and 'scripted' nature of the tradition as well as the transcendence of the divine so as not to let anything slip the mazes of his logical net.

Far from dismissing this as a conservative or backward development, even though it will prove Abelard to be out of step with the general evolution of scholastic method, my aim here is altogether different. Although he indeed manipulates the voice of the tradition, the more interesting phenomenon is his assembly of all available resources to analyze all matters on a single horizontal plane, even though this plane contains greater depth than we may think. Both in his regard for 'scriptural' or 'scripted' authority and in the interrelation between the three divine persons, furthermore, Abelard's approach is marked by a keen awareness that there are limitations to his understanding of the past and of divine transcendence which ought to be respected. This respect conditions his rational approach to the point of proactively affecting his strategy. Instead of overextending humanity's power of interpretation to cover what exceeds its grasp, i.e., divine transcendence, as was Eriugena's approach, or to adorn human rationality by collapsing the imaginative into the analytical, as the preferred method of William of Conches, Abelard remains singularly determined to fight his battles on one plane only, i.e., that of his own theo-logic. It is for this purpose that we find him honing and refining the predicative qualities of human language with a patience that is altogether atypical.

The problems that his complex handling of theological language causes to his interpreters are considerable and manifold. Not only should they be able to spot the seams in the tapestry of his arguments, but they must determine whether these are merely the result of superficial editing, of which he was more than capable, or form a deeper problem, marking one of the intellectual knots perhaps. Beyond this, we have to find out where the seams may be puckering, and why. Before doing so, a final warning must be heeded. It generally appears as if the overriding characteristic of Abelard's use of language is that it is folded 'outside in' rather than 'inside out', as he challenges his readers to try and roll back his folded arguments. Compounding the difficulties of Abelardian interpretation even further in this regard is the fact that his discourse lacks an external framework, a fixed perspective from which to follow appreciatively the movements of his supple mind. If we compare Abelard to Bernard

of Clairvaux for a moment, we find an even greater linguistic virtuoso in his Cistercian contemporary. Yet in Bernard, contrary to Abelard, there always is the monastic round of prayer hovering in the background of his texts, allowing us to put his sermons in a liturgical context.³² The appearance of such a traditional monastic outlook, even if a product of rhetorical illusion, prevents his linguistic pyrotechnics from going awry, that is, as long as his readers heed the earnestness of this setting.³³ With Bernard contemporary readers mostly did, even when he subverted the conventional monastic setting beyond recognition. The rolled-up quality of Abelard's language, by contrast, conveys the latter's reasoning in such a way that it is supposed to sway monks and clerics alike, as he stubbornly withholds any criteria by which to assess whether his arguments have reached home. With his self-enclosed language echoing the self-enclosed character of the Trinity, the only option is to evaluate his discourse.

IV *Abelard's 'Theologies': Structure and Content*

If we now turn to his *Theologia 'Summi boni'*, the infamous book that Abelard was ordered to burn at the council of Soissons in 1121, we find there what is in fact the outline of all his subsequent Trinitarian

³² This does not mean that Bernard's sermons do not have a high degree of artificiality. Thus his *Sermons on the Songs* were decidedly never preached, although Bernard gives the distinct impression of being involved in a kind of continuous lecture series. A striking example of contrived spontaneity is *sermo* 26 on the death of his brother Gerard. See M.B. Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought. Broken Dreams* (Leiden, 1994), 163–206.

³³ It is interesting that Abelard proves to be a most suspicious reader of Bernard in this regard, seeing him monastically as a kind of new kid on the block. This is countered by Bernard, who sees Abelard in Letter 190 as the fifth evangelist without whom the church is better off. See *Epistola* 190.V.12, in: J. Leclercq, H. Rochais (eds), *S. Bernardi Opera Vol. VIII. Epistolae*, Rome 1977, 27, trans. A.J. Luddy O.Cist. (Westminster, 1947), 74: 'Keep to yourself, therefore, what is yours. I will listen to the prophets and the apostles, and I will obey the Gospel, not, however, the Gospel according to Peter. Have you composed for us a new gospel? But the Church refuses to recognise a fifth evangelist.' See for a broader comparison between Bernard and Abelard also my article 'Authority and Identity in the Transition from Monastic to Scholastic Theology: Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux,' in: J. Frishman, W. Otten and G. Rouwhorst, *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation* (Leiden, 2004), 349–368.

speculations. While he may have further refined this outline, he appears not to have substantially altered it in the later *Theologia christiana*. In the *Theologia 'Summi boni'*, we see Abelard laying out what he thinks constitutes good Trinitarian theology, i.e., an adequate yet reverential representation in human language of the divine as embodying the perfection of the highest good. In addition to seeing the Trinity as the reality most fully encapsulating the Christian God, Abelard's agenda reaches far beyond the single goal of description, as he wants to persuade his readers to engage in divine worship—by which he means the cult of the one (Christian) God—as the only way to achieve human salvation. This last point is brought out more forcefully in the later *Theologia 'Scholarium'*, where Abelard integrates his Trinitarian doctrine as that which is to be believed within a more inclusive theological context. This context defines *fides*, *caritas* and *sacramenta* as the three things which constitute the *summa*, not of theology but, much more boldly, of human salvation.³⁴ This latter point brings us to a kind of totalizing quality of Abelard's discourse to which we shall periodically return.

Notwithstanding the development of Abelard's various ideas and arguments, his methodological approach to the doctrine of the Trinity remains essentially the same throughout all his 'Theologies'. Although his convoluted reasoning gives his treatises the appearance of a stylistic patchwork, their underlying conceptual structure is rather simple. We will expound this structure in the barest form in which it is found in his earliest *Theologia*. Given the importance of the Trinity as Christianity's central doctrine, Abelard searches for ways to explain the seemingly contradictory qualities involved in this concept by analyzing the Trinity according to three different problems of logic. As can be expected from such a well-trained mind, he does so by working out an acceptable interpretation of the interrelation of the three divine persons which neither compromises nor contradicts the oneness of the Christian God.

His first analysis of the Trinity deals with the logical difficulties entailed by the contrast between *idem* and *diversum*.³⁵ This topic was

³⁴ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* I.1, ed. Buytaert and Mews, CCCM 13: 318: *Tria sunt, ut arbitror, in quibus humanae salutis summa consistit, fides uidelicet, caritas et sacramenta.*

³⁵ My analysis follows the text of *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.III 82–106, ed. Buytaert and Mews, CCCM 13: 142–52.

widely popular in the twelfth century not just in the area of logic but also in that of natural science, as is clear from Adelard of Bath's work by the same name. More than just replacing the old Platonic metaphysical problem of the One and the Many with its Boethian equivalents, Abelard wants to study the implications of various interpretations of *idem* and *diversum* for humanity's accurate predication of the divine. In this respect he is merely true to his efforts on the horizontal plane of language. He explains, for example, how things can be 'the same' or 'one' according to number or essence. This is true in the case of synonyms, as the words 'substance' or 'body' can be used interchangeably to indicate one and the same object. In addition, things can also be the same according to definition, according to likeness or according to incommutability (God must always be the same, as this arises from his incommutability). Finally, things can also be the same with regard to their effect. To match this fivefold analysis of *idem*, there naturally must be an equal number of ways of interpreting *diversum*. Abelard gives clear and instructive examples in all these cases. Returning to the issue at hand, Abelard ends his speculations by arguing that, while there is indeed a diversity of persons in the Trinity, there still is and only can be one divine substance. The divine persons may be different from each other according to their definition, as Christ is Son to God the Father, or they may have different properties (*proprietales*), as wisdom is different from omnipotence, yet they all share the same essence and are one in number. Thus he adheres faithfully to the standard monotheistic claim of one Christian God.

A second oppositional pair is that of the *one essence* or substance versus the *three persons*. In fact, this opposition quickly dissolves into two new ones, as Abelard analyzes not just the problem of oneness versus threeness but also the concept of essence versus that of person(s). Abelard starts to analyze the problem caused by the logical opposition between the numbers one and three, which he typically solves by rephrasing it. He changes the statement that there are three persons in the one godhead into the new statement that it is convenient to understand Father, Son and Holy Spirit differently/separately.³⁶ Other than giving us another glimpse of Abelard's *ratio* at

³⁶ See *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.V.109, CCCM 13: 153: 'Especially, just as in grammar, when we say three persons we understand the speaker, the one spoken to and

work, the semantic change he proposes here also manifests his keen awareness of the serious problems faced by human language when it undertakes to analyze the divine. Introducing a subtle shift of perspective, he decides to focus no longer on the divine persons themselves but rather on humanity's ability and need, frankly, to distinguish carefully between them. In an attempt to explain how numerical opposition is an opposition that may puzzle our perception but leaves a thing's actual being unaffected, Abelard brings up an intricate example from the study of grammar. He explains how in the art of grammar we can actually split up a single human being into three different persons, so to speak, as when a grammarian differentiates between the one who speaks, the one whom is spoken to, and the one whom is spoken about. All the while it is clear that he denotes the same human person. His point with this example is that a three-ness of divine persons need not imply a multiplication of divine substance, just as this is obviously not the case in the illustrative example from grammar. After grammar and rhetoric, to which he also refers,³⁷ theology is the third art or discipline for Abelard in which there are multiple modes of understanding what precisely is entailed by the concept of person. We should emphasize that his chosen procedure in the matter at hand has the important side effect of revealing to us how he still sees theology as closely linked to the arts of the *trivium*.

Abelard's most famous and most controversial contribution to Trinitarian theology is undoubtedly his elaborate web of distinctions whereby he differentiates between the three divine persons according to their different properties (*propria/proprietates*).³⁸ The Father signifies omnipotence, as he is the only person to receive being from himself. The Son who is begotten from the Father represents wisdom, in accordance with his specific property of discernment. Finally the Spirit, who proceeds from both, signifies *benignitas* or generosity. Both in *Theologia 'Summi boni'* and *Theologia christiana* Abelard goes so

the one spoken about separately, as we noted above, in the same way when we say that there are three persons in the godhead, it is fitting that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are separately understood, as we elucidated above.'

³⁷ See *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.V.110–12, CCCM 13: 153–54.

³⁸ See *Theologia 'Summi boni'* III.I.1, CCCM 13: 157: *Tres quidem, ut diximus, secundum diffinitiones aut proprietates, non secundum numerum* ('They are three, as we said, in respect of definitions or properties, not according to number').

far as to anchor the truth of his intricate speculations directly on a revelation by Jesus Christ whose references to the Trinity must after all be divinely authored, as he himself is wisdom incarnate. Was it not Christ himself who, in describing the perfection of the highest good, taught us to distinguish between three different divine names? Moreover, did he not thereby inaugurate the practice of calling the divine substance Father, Son and Holy Spirit after their three respective causes, i.e., omnipotence, wisdom and *benignitas*?³⁹ The shortcut from biblical truth to theological speculation seems to exempt Abelard from the obligation to construct a more elaborate defense of the Trinity based on the liberal arts.⁴⁰

Not that he would be incapable of providing such a defense of his own accord. In fact, his reasoning offers far more than a mere defense. By explaining how the various, mostly logical, contradictions in the doctrine of the Trinity are in point of fact all non-contradictions, Abelard turns his own logical findings into plausible and prudent theological working hypotheses. This makes it all the more striking that, when called upon to defend his findings, Abelard can at times abandon his common methodological prudence. Perhaps because he is not dealing with the divine persons themselves but merely with his human peers, we suddenly notice how he feels free to engage in relentless attacks, as these may culminate in presumptuous hyperbole. The opening of the *Theologia 'Summi boni'* and *Theologia christiana*, where he argues in fact that his idea of divine properties or *propria* was instigated by Christ himself, may be seen as one such instance, as it allows him to preempt discussion rather than setting the rules for conducting a fair debate. But just when he seems to push the validity of his arguments entirely beyond the tradition, if not beyond belief, he again becomes remarkably careful.

³⁹ See *Theologia christiana* I.1, CCCM 12: 72: 'The Lord Christ, incarnate wisdom of God, brought about a distinction in the perfection of the highest good which is God by diligently describing it with three names, when he called the unique and singular, totally undivided and simple divine substance Father, Son and Holy Spirit after its three causes: Father according to its unique power . . .; Son according to the discretion of its own wisdom . . .; Holy Spirit according to its benign grace. . . .' Cf. *Theologia 'Summi boni'* I.I.1–I.II.1, CCCM 13: 86–87.

⁴⁰ It is not my intent to give a complete survey of Abelard's entire trinitarian theology here. It is for this reason that my analysis omits such analogies as that of the wax, the metal seal, and the impression the seal leaves in the wax, which can be found in *Theologia christiana* IV.87–93; IV.102; IV.106. The focus of my analysis is clearly on the relation between language, reason and the expression of divine realities.

As an example we might look to *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II ch. 2 ff., where Abelard states the by now familiar Ciceronian claim that every controversy involves either *scriptum* or *ratio*. In pondering this conventional claim, Abelard explains how in defending his view of the Trinity—and we may repeat here that his strategy in *Theologia christiana* and in *Theologia 'Scholarium'* is largely identical—, his standard approach is *first* to weave a network of authorities only *thereafter* to prop them up by having recourse to reason.⁴¹ But the procedure he here describes, consulting the authorities first after which to call on reason's help, does not always mirror his actual practice in the 'Theologies'. It rather seems as if his urge to join human and divine on the level playing field of human logic makes him at times conveniently forget about the proposed duality of his own practice.⁴² Invoking a traditional topos, for which he calls upon the authority of Augustine,⁴³ Abelard defends himself by insisting that it is only to counter his opponents' cleverness that he needs to dash into logic so as not to leave the simplicity of Trinitarian faith unprotected.

The fact that Abelard wishes to see the rational defense of faith ultimately as secondary to the divine word of Scripture or the testimonies of the church's tradition but does not in fact proceed in this way, allows us to explain other peculiarities of his approach as well. It is still puzzling, for example, why he felt at such liberty to address his opponents by means of frontal attacks, leaving them not merely unconvinced but exceedingly insulted. His ridicule extends especially to the pseudo-dialecticians whom he accuses of not 'using, but rather abusing' the liberal arts with their miniature rationality

⁴¹ See *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.2, CCCM 13: 114: 'And therefore it seemed exceedingly apposite that we have culled the authorities for the foundation of our faith from the writings of excellent wise men, and that in addition we stuff these authoritatively with reasons in these cases where objections seem not unreasonable, mainly so that the wordiness of the enemies of Christ does not abuse our simplicity. For having made some ignorant or less educated Christians trip over the snares of their fake logic, they ascribe it to their own highest glory.'

⁴² It is interesting that Abelard seems to extend the inspired nature of the Bible also to the writings of the Fathers, as becomes apparent in *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.III.76, CCCM 13: 140. Abelard states against the dialecticians who want to reason about God: '... learn the ways of speaking handed down by incarnate wisdom itself and by the holy fathers, whom their lives and miracles testify to have been an instrument of the Holy Spirit'.

⁴³ See *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.5 with editorial references to *De ordine* II.13.38 and *De doctrina christiana* II.31.48.

(*ratiuncula humana*).⁴⁴ We will leave aside the reactions of these and other opponents for the moment, and concentrate just on his approach. To get a fuller understanding of why he proceeds in this way, displaying caution in safeguarding Christian faith in the Trinity but defending it relentlessly against his opponents, to the point of fiercely attacking them, we need to inquire into the deeper meaning of knowledge and science for Abelard, especially insofar as it relates to the Trinity.

In various passages throughout his 'Theologies' we find Abelard engaged in more abstract debates on the intrinsic validity of knowledge. Throughout these we find him invariably stressing that knowledge itself can never be evil. Not even the knowledge of evil is in itself evil. The same applies to power, as we should not regard the power to do evil as evil. Abelard's reasoning in all this goes as follows. Knowledge ultimately stems from God, as does power. Since God, who rules and controls all things, is thereby also the origin and source of all science and knowledge, knowledge itself cannot be evil. Neither is the power to do evil by definition evil. For Abelard, only the *use* one makes of knowledge or power is evil.⁴⁵ While such statements are interesting, they are not significant in and of themselves. When we connect the exercise of *scientia* in *Theologia christiana* with Abelard's allegory of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in his *Hexaemeron*-commentary, we seem to hit upon one of these junctions of theological reasoning that may give us a deeper insight in what drives Abelard's discourse.

The case at hand is especially instructive, inasmuch as it may help us further to clarify his high esteem for *ingenium*. Faced with the task of interpreting Adam's eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Abelard draws a remarkable comparison between the eating from this tree with the drinking of wine. He states the following:

For this reason they call this vine the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for the wine produced from the fruit of this tree consumed moderately or immoderately gives a man good or bad sense, that is, makes

⁴⁴ See *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.21, CCCM 13: 121: 'What greater indignity could there be for believers than to profess having a God whom little human reasons might comprehend and the tongue of mortals explain?' So much for Abelard's faith in proofs for the existence of God!

⁴⁵ See e.g. *Theologia christiana* III.6.

that he has his wits about him or not, as the wine either sharpens his talent or perverts it.⁴⁶

The question at issue is not whether or not one should drink from the wine, but whether or not one exercises moderation in doing so. The degree of self-restraint thus determines whether a man is *in bono* or *in malo sensu*, that is, whether the effect of the wine—like knowledge as the effect of eating from the tree—either sharpens his ingenuity or perverts it.⁴⁷

Attributing knowledge and power is ultimately a matter of perspective for Abelard, as they both require a certain prudence and moderation from the person who exercises these faculties. Instead of being intended to bring God and humans closer, as points on the same horizon, Abelard's arguments move in a different direction, as he focuses on the depth of vision of which the beholder must be capable. Again he points to the total inadequacy of all human language from the perspective of the divine, making the following statement in *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II 73, repeated in his other 'Theologies':

Is it surprising if God, when he appears to transcend all things in an ineffable manner, exceeds as well the human institution of speech? And when his superiority far exceeds all understanding, but words are instituted on account of understanding, is it surprising then if he who transcends the causes also transcends the effects? A thing can be thought out much more easily than it can be expounded. Is it really so surprising if God breaks the rules of philosophers within himself who often squashes them in reality, as when he makes things new against nature or above nature, that is, above what the first creation of things can do?⁴⁸

Far from indicating any resignation on Abelard's part, this last point may help us begin to understand why his contemporaries considered

⁴⁶ See *Expositio in Hexaemeron*, PL 178: 777C. In PL 178: 777D–778A Abelard connects this interpretation with the episode of Noah's drunkenness in Genesis 9:20–22. After Adam people had shunned the touching of grapes and drinking of wine. After the flood, however, Noah forgot this and immediately got drunk, while baring himself as well. It is clear from Abelard's association that a perversion of one's *ingenium* leads to a perversion of one's morals as well.

⁴⁷ It is important to realize throughout that Abelard applauds the philosophers in part for their sober lifestyle, which seems to underscore the legitimacy of their thought for him. Apparently, philosophical self-control improves the quality of one's thoughts. See e.g. *Theologia christiana* I.54.

⁴⁸ See *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.III.73, CCCM 13: 139.

his Trinitarian analysis so upsetting. Going back to the initial plan of the *Theologia 'Summi boni'*, we find Abelard asking at the beginning of book III whether the *trinitas personarum* is *in vocabulis* or *in re*. At first sight he proves himself remarkably close here to Augustine. Did Augustine not even go farther in the first book of *On Christian Doctrine* by claiming that the Trinity was the only thing (*res*) worthy of attention, compared to which all other things, including words, could only be seen as signs (*signa*)?⁴⁹ In contrast with Augustine, however, who considered natural and verbal signs equally laden with divine meaning, with biblical language ultimately subsuming and transcending both in a category all its own, Abelard narrows his playing field to the realm of *vocabula* alone.⁵⁰ His chosen arena is the level playing field of language, whereby the difference between logical and biblical language is negligible.⁵¹ By restricting the impact of interpretation to words he enhances the particular 'rolled-up' quality of his statements, as their frame of reference is not immediately apparent. In good Boethian fashion, moreover, indicating yet another difference with Augustine's Neoplatonic mindset, we find Abelard frequently referring to language as a human institution. By this he means that its accuracy is ultimately dependent on the right imposition of words. Like Augustine, however, he still holds divine reality to be the ultimate *res* and as such, to have an impact that goes far beyond human speech. Since God transcends everything, he will surely transcend human speech. Although this position seems to undercut the validity of his own arguments, it also opens up possibilities for his *ingenium* not realized before. By maintaining that language, as a human convention, inherently fails to express the reality of the divine, which must remain ineffable, Abelard suggests that when we speak about God, it can only be in similitudes. Since predicating God is thus all about finding the right metaphors, it is incumbent upon the theologian to find them.

⁴⁹ See above n. 29.

⁵⁰ For my analysis of Abelard's use of language I have benefited greatly from the insightful study by Jean Jolivet, *Arts du langage et théologie chez Abélard* (Paris, 1969), especially from its subtle exposition of the hardware of Abelard's semantics as it flows into his wider metaphysics and theology. More broadly, on the issue of the symbolism of medieval language, I have benefited from M.L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language. A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (1968; rev. ed., Lincoln, 1983).

⁵¹ If there is a difference at all, it is a matter of to whom the utterance of language is attributed. E.g., when Christ utters words about the Trinity, those words are no mere observations but reflect and embody his divine authority.

With all statements about God wrapped in metaphorical and parabolic language, therefore, they can only bear a faint resemblance to him. On other occasions, Abelard states that we merely speak *in umbra* or *in similitudine*, expressing verisimilitude rather than truth itself. Although such statements seem to diminish the compelling effectiveness of his logical arguments, his continued insistence on logic shows this impression to be incorrect. For one so trained in logic as Abelard, it is much more likely that such provisos are meant to emphasize the extreme relevance of his logical endeavor. Do they not provide his readers with an extra exhortation to find the most suitable images for the Trinity? As Abelard puts it in *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.III.78, using slightly different terms: 'since there are fewer clear images for something that is unique, we are less easily satisfied with similitudes about God.'⁵²

Taking Abelard's caveats seriously allows us also to shed a different light on the supposed opposition between logical and metaphorical language. For the precision of logic applied on the level of discourse, so I want to suggest, is a powerful alternative to the dynamic conveyed by the more poetic practice of 'negative theology'. While Abelard spurs us on to find ever new syllogisms, he is at the same time intimating underneath that the truth implied by them, once found and established, will never encapsulate divine splendor itself. It is as if with one hand Abelard shatters Anselm's ontological argument into a thousand pieces, while with his other he tries to glue them back together by arranging his manifold Trinitarian similes to reflect the power of *unum argumentum*. What he does not seem to realize—if we may slip in a literary judgment here—is that this procedure inevitably yields the fragility of a cracked bowl.⁵³ What ultimately

⁵² See *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.III.78, CCCM 13: 141: *Et quoniam minus plenarias similitudines inuenimus ad illud quod singulare est inducendas, minus de eo satisfacere possumus per similitudines.*

⁵³ See Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (1904; Harmondsworth, 1974), where the very beauty of the bowl turns out to be deceptive, as it is later detected to be cracked. This idea of the cracked bowl seems also to guide the author's 'way of looking' in the novel. See James' preface on p. 7: 'Among many matters thrown into relief by a refreshed acquaintance with 'The Golden Bowl' what perhaps most stands out for me is the still marked inveteracy of a certain indirect and oblique view of my presented action; unless indeed I make up my mind to call this mode of treatment, on the contrary, any superficial appearance notwithstanding, the very straightest and closest possible.'

unites Anselm and Abelard despite their differences is the fact that the language used for the divine should be both adequate and reverential.

Choosing the right similitudes is a matter of crucial urgency for Abelard, one that becomes only more apparent in the later 'Theologies'. Yet his urgency is not just fueled by the drive to complete his epistemological project of naming the divine, however comprehensive its scope, insofar as Abelard's preference for similitudes threatens indeed to undercut the cogency of his logic. At this point we must bring in the moral argument from Genesis. Choosing the right images is important for Abelard, because it allows him to distinguish between sharpening and perverting one's *ingenium*. The fact that such a moral dimension underlies the right use of language explains why in Abelard the theological endeavors can have the paradoxical effect of feeding self-doubt, even when presenting intellectual certainty. Knowledge and self-knowledge are simply inseparable for Abelard. This means that in studying the dilemma of talent *versus* tradition, especially when relating this to an assessment of Abelard's theological achievement, we always need to contextualize his arguments, trying to estimate even how successful he may have judged himself in finding the right words to describe God. From a historical perspective, it is exactly on this last point that a glaring discrepancy separates Abelard's self-evaluation from the verdict rendered by his contemporaries. While his contemporaries judged him as pushing much too far, it was actually by restricting himself to the realm of similitudes, but using all his ingenuity to find those few that best approximate the mystery of the Trinity, that Abelard wanted to proceed.

V *Abelard's 'Christology':⁵⁴ Between Divine Justice and Human Sinfulness*

While the reading of Abelard's 'Theologies' can be a disappointing experience, as his feistiness tends to detract from the seriousness of his arguments while his logical excursions seem invariably 'thin', we

⁵⁴ Based on the fact that I see Abelard as a thinker whose theology does not conform to later scholastic categories, I use the term 'Christology' here in a broad sense, which is not confined to the person of Christ, but includes his incarnation, his saving work (soteriology) and the relations between the persons of the Trinity.

find a considerable thickening of arguments when we move from the first *Theology*, the *Theologia 'Summi boni'*, to the last, the *Theologia 'Scholarium'*. It gradually becomes clear that these logical exercises, for all they may seem, are in the end much more than empty language games for Abelard. More than a mere matter of orthodoxy, they are about Christianity's ultimate truths. At the same time, however, they also are about human beings shaping their own destiny, reverting to the personal undercurrent of Abelard's theological works.⁵⁵ It was after all his distinct view that humans have a choice either to sharpen or to pervert their own *ingenium*. Let us try to see then if and how we can put Abelard's own use of *ingenium* in his 'Theologies' to the test, if not in an autobiographical then at least in an exemplary sense.

It goes without saying that, of the innate talent available, Abelard had received more than the usual sliver. The fact that he was keenly aware of this lends a particular urgency to his reasoning, an urgency which, while rooted in a kind of self-importance, he felt more and more pressed to bring to the surface, as his own theological thinking developed and matured. This may help to explain why his focus gradually switched from the unity of divine substance and the Trinity of divine persons as a largely linguistic and epistemological problem stated in *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.1.28,⁵⁶ to the more confessional, seemingly existential but at any rate explicitly subjective statement found at the beginning of the *Theologia 'Scholarium'*. At the opening of this work Abelard poignantly unfolds his theological program as follows:

Christology, in other words, refers to the natural gravitation of his thought to present a Christ-centered theology. A thorough treatment of the locus of Abelard's Christology along more conventional theological lines is given by R.E. Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love. A Critical Analysis of the Soteriology of Peter Abailard* (Oxford, 1970), 97–206. I do not follow Weingart in privileging the theocentricity of Abelard's soteriology, see Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love*, 202–03.

⁵⁵ Rather than seeing this as a biographical illustration, I see it as an elaboration of the general teaching motto of the age: to teach by word and example. See C. Walker Bynum, *Docere verbo et exemplo. An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality*. Harvard Theological Studies XXXI (Missoula, 1979), 181–199.

⁵⁶ See *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.1.28, CCCM 13: 123–24: 'First we need to lay down the theme of the entire disputation and give a brief summary of our faith, namely about the unity of the divine substance and the trinity of persons who are in God, who are in fact one God. After that we shall submit the objections against the statement of faith and finally come up with solutions'.

There are three things, so I think, in which the sum of human salvation consists, namely faith, love and sacraments (*Tria sunt, ut arbitror, in quibus humanae salutis summa consistit, fides videlicet, caritas et sacramenta*).⁵⁷

Knowing about salvation, therefore, rather than indulging in epistemological acrobatics, even when these involve the Trinity, now seems to become his aim. Yet knowledge about salvation is never completely severed from its practical application, as it is readily transformed into the quest for salvation. Whether the personal undercurrent of Abelard's texts is thereby tilted from the exemplary to the existential is a question on which the jury is still out, especially since it is exceedingly difficult to determine what the epithet 'autobiographical' in Abelard's case really means.⁵⁸ What is undeniably clear, however, is that, rather than epistemology providing the context for salvation history, henceforth salvation history conditions and frames whatever logical project he will undertake.

In retrospect, it may well appear as if this development of Abelard's thought was foreshadowed from the beginning. At the same time, however, the way in which Abelard sets things up continues to cause endless problems of interpretation. We have seen, for example, how he does not distinguish clearly between the epistemological and the moral side of his arguments. Also, we will again face the difficulty of his 'rolled-up' language or, as we have alternatively described it, may arrive at one of the junctions where Abelard's arguments begin to form an intellectual knot. An illuminating case of such a knotty point was already apparent in the *Theologia* 'Summi boni' II.18–19. There we saw Abelard lashing out against the so-called pseudo-dialecticians. Interrupting his tirade, he comments on the many problems involved in effective teaching:

And unless he instructs the mind from within, whoever teaches shall merely be mouthing air on the outside. How else can it be explained

⁵⁷ See *Theologia* 'Scholarium' I.1, CCCM 13: 318.

⁵⁸ The discussion about twelfth-century autobiography was prompted by the publication of Colin Morris' study, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200* (1972; Toronto, 1987). See also A. Gurevich, *The Origins of European Individualism* (Oxford, 1995), 110–55, especially 126–45 on Abelard. See also P. von Moos, 'Abelard, Heloise und Ihr Paraklet: Ein Kloster nach Mass. Zugleich eine Streitschrift gegen die ewige Wiederkehr hermeneutischer Naivität,' in: G. Melville and M. Schürer (eds), *Das Eigene und das Ganze. Zum Individuellen im mittelalterlichen Religiosentum* (Münster, 2002), 563–619.

that, while the words of a certain teacher are equally carried to the ears of different people, they are not equally understood by them, unless the inner master who teaches whom he wants even without a word, is close to some, but minimally present to others? About the wisdom of this Master it is written: *Wisdom shall not enter a malevolent soul nor shall it dwell in a body repressed by sins* (Wisdom 1:4).

And this did not escape the philosophers, who thought that the knowledge of God ought to be acquired not by reasoning but by living well and urged us to strive for it more by conduct than by words. Hence Socrates, as we reminded you above, did not want souls that were unclean due to earthly desires to direct themselves to divine matters. Therefore he judged that one exert oneself to purge one's life through good morals.⁵⁹

At first sight Abelard's reasoning in this passage reminds us of the familiar epistemological metaphor of the interior master, developed by Augustine, as in this way the bishop refers to the presence of Christ in the minds of those whom he chooses to enlighten in his famous *De magistro*.⁶⁰ But Abelard is not talking about knowledge as binding all Christians first to Christ and then to each other, as was Augustine's Christian alternative to Plato's anamnesis theory. For Abelard, quite a different scenario applies. In accordance with his twelfth-century understanding of Christianity as potentially being the world's all-encompassing culture, he can no longer consider its truth as either exclusive or self-evident. While it may seem as if Abelard merely needed to undergird Christian truth with new philosophical arguments, as Thomas Aquinas and other scholastic thinkers borrowing from Aristotle would subsequently do, he does not go down this scholastic route. Within his twelfth-century context, it is the peculiar effect of his intellectual self-awareness as a Christian not simply to boost the Christian doctrine of faith, but to reform and reconfigure all knowledge from a Christian, more specifically, a Christo-centric perspective. This gives his claims a much wider range, as he ultimately

⁵⁹ *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.18–19, CCCM 13: 119–20.

⁶⁰ As indicated by the editor, there is an echo of Gregory the Great's gospel homilies (*Hom. in evang.* II, *hom.* 30, PL 76: 1222A) in the first half of the passage. Yet, Abelard's own reasoning seems devoid of such explicit Christological overtones as found in Augustine, *De magistro* XI.38, ed. K.-D. Daur, CCSL 29: 196: 'Our real teacher is he who is so listened to, who is said to dwell in the inner man, namely Christ, that is, the unchangeable power and eternal wisdom of God. To this wisdom every rational soul gives heed, but to each is given only so much as he is able to receive, according to his own good or evil will'.

aims at nothing less than to define or redefine the scope of knowledge *per se*.

Given this perspective, it naturally is a matter of grave concern to him why Christ was not present in everybody prior to the birth of Christianity.⁶¹ Presented here under the universalizing aspect of knowledge as coextensive with Christianity, this problem was relatively new. But it was to become only more acute over the course of the following centuries. With Jewish and Islamic views becoming not just better known but also more manifestly expressed, there slowly began to arise a need to have a synthetic and coherent picture, in which to integrate these different religions with the truth of Christianity.⁶² With the problem of competing religious truths not yet having acquired its thirteenth-century profile,⁶³ Abelard's problem was a different one. What he needed to account for was the sense of a deeper disparity of knowledge running through each and every religion, rather than being restricted to only one. Abelard faced the concrete problem how it was possible that non-Christians could arrive at the truth by themselves, whereas at the same time his fellow-Christians conspicuously failed at this. One obvious line of reasoning open to him was to adduce the absence of Christ as the reason why not everybody developed a correct understanding of the uniquely Christian concept of Trinity. In light of the above, it is not surprising that this was not Abelard's course, as it had been that of many of his predecessors. For Abelard, however, in contrast with Augustine, the dichotomy running through humanity was no longer that of church *versus* non-church, reflecting an institutional or pas-

⁶¹ This is a problem with which Christianity perennially struggles and for which figures like Justin Martyr formulated classic answers. His solution consisted in claiming continuity between classical philosophy, isolated from pagan religion, and Christian thought. See H. Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (1966; Oxford, 1984), 1–30. As I will try to make clear, for Abelard the problem goes beyond its traditional confines, as what is at stake is not just the possibility of revealed knowledge, but of knowledge *per se*.

⁶² Thus Aquinas wrote his *Summa contra Gentiles* for Dominican missionaries in the Muslim world. See J.A. Aertsen, 'Aquinas's philosophy in its historical setting,' and D.B. Burrell C.S.C., 'Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish Thinkers,' in: N. Kretzmann and E. Stump (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge, 1993), 12–37 (Aertsen) and 60–84 (Burrell).

⁶³ Although it started to make itself felt in Alan of Lille's *Contra Haereticos* directed against Cathars, Waldensians, Jews and Muslims. See on this, G.R. Evans, *Alan of Lille. The Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1983), 102–32.

toral concern, but that of understanding *versus* incomprehension, reflecting his all-out intellectual quest for truth.

Instead of dwelling on Christ's absence, Abelard makes an integral connection between the knowledge of God and the right art of living, which he sees symbolically represented in the figure of Socrates. Again, his attention to Socrates reveals how there is a distinct moral quality to the possession of truth for Abelard, which both completes and crowns its epistemological accuracy. The presence of wisdom seems to count so much for him that one can almost substitute it for Christ himself, even in his role of revealing truths that are uniquely Christian such as the Trinity. Typical of Abelard's sought-after wisdom is that it comprises rational knowledge and right moral behavior. While a kind of moral overtone is present in Abelard's thinking all along, at times weighing down the spontaneity of his metaphors, during the course of his intellectual development it seems to become more and more explicit. In the next chapter we shall discuss the parallel development of this ethical strand of his thinking more fully, as it eventually culminates in his *Ethics*. Here we will discuss how an ethical interest also underlies his more explicitly theological arguments, resulting in a noticeable 'thickening' of their salvific resonance.

To trace this resonance, I shall proceed as follows. First I shall analyze how Abelard actually deals with the pagan philosophers in books I and II of his *Theologia christiana*. We will see how Abelard regards them as 'living out' a life of wisdom, which he deems fully compatible with Christian faith, even though they never professed that faith. Next we will look to his theology of incarnation, with the figure of Christ symbolizing the fount of revealed wisdom, to see what, if anything, Abelard makes of the added value of Christian revelation as compared to pagan philosophy. To this end we will turn to his *Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans*. There we find Abelard's solution for the problem of the incarnation, on which he sheds such a more 'hopeful' but at the same time also much bleaker light, that is, as far as the return to paradise is concerned, than Anselm's interpretation did for an earlier generation.

V A. *Philosophy and the Philosophers in Theologia christiana*

Abelard begins his *Theologia christiana* by explaining the distinction between the persons of the Trinity, for which he leans heavily on scriptural arguments, that is, on arguments borrowed from written

documents. His first emphasis is on the words of the creed, as the Father is unborn (*ingenitus*), the Son born (*genitus*) and the Holy Spirit proceeding from both (*ab utrisque procedens*), at least according to the testimony of Gregory the Great.⁶⁴ He continues by referring to the Father as omnipotence (*omnipotentia*), to the Son as wisdom (*sapientia*) and to the Holy Spirit as love (*caritas*). Other distinguishing features like the Son's eternal generation defeating the position of the Jews who reject Christ's godhead, are mentioned along the way. It becomes more and more evident that he wants to bring out especially how the divine Word (*Verbum*) is not created but creates. In *Theologia christiana* I.53–54 Abelard concludes his overview of scriptural passages, in which he generally tried to bring the text of Old Testament prophecy in line with his exposition of the Trinity, with the following comment:

It is clear then from what we stated above that the Word of God as much as his Spirit are God, just as the one of whom they are Word or Spirit. Let them then understand, as is said, that this Word of the Lord, i.e., the Son of God, is not a transitory word, nor an audible one, but an intellectual word, that is reason or wisdom itself insofar as it is co-eternal with God, that which we fittingly call ever-present wisdom just as we speak of omnipotence . . .

[54] But now after the prophetic testimonies about faith in the Holy Trinity, let us also add the testimonies of the philosophers. Philosophical reason itself drew them to the understanding of the one God, for according to the Apostle 'Since the creation of the world, the invisible attributes of God have been understood by the things that are made' (Rom. 1:20); likewise the sobriety of a life of abstinence acquired this for them by way of merit. God was obliged even then to prefigure in them through something the gift of a greater grace, by which he who lives soberly and withdraws himself from the excesses of this world by spurning them is more acceptable to Him than he who, given to voluptuous deeds, immerses himself in obscenities.⁶⁵

As this passage makes clear, Abelard needs some defense to justify his use of philosophical arguments. Aside from its moral overtones, to which I will come back in the following chapter, his defense is largely conducted on two counts. First, it appears that since philosophical arguments have been made against him, Abelard obviously

⁶⁴ Abelard seems to operate on the acceptance of the *filioque* as the classical position. On the procession of the Spirit, see *Theologia christiana* IV.117–53.

⁶⁵ *Theologia christiana* I.53–54, CCCM 12: 93–94.

feels he can return the favor. Second, in his opinion he is merely imitating divine procedure. Just as God used the infidels and the reprobate to spread his message and work his wonders, so Abelard feels he can do likewise. Sharp-witted as always, he makes use of the argument that God makes use of unworthy ministers to administer the sacraments to this day. Disguising his attack on the contemporary priesthood only barely, he says that God even went so far as to use the words of a donkey to prophesy great things, the reason for preferring an animal to human prophets being that its acts of foretelling would necessarily be attributed to the godhead and not be mistaken for the accomplishments of great men.⁶⁶

By referring to 'philosophical reason' (*ratio philosophica*), Abelard speaks in fact about arguments borrowed from philosophical writings. As he reveals later on, it is not even clear that he actually studied these, as he may have received them indirectly through the writings of the Fathers. This can explain why they still fall under the heading of *scripta*, as they do not belong to the realm of *ratio* proper, whose power will determine his approach only in book III. Derived from the Fathers or not, the gist of his philosophical arguments is relatively close to what we discussed in the previous chapter about William of Conches. In his selection and interpretation of philosophical texts Abelard seems especially fascinated by Plato's World Soul, whose workings he likewise compares to the role of the Holy Spirit. As for Plato and William, the world is an animated body for Abelard, in which the divine somehow governs everything. Plato seems to display an accurate knowledge of the Trinity when he speaks about *Nous* as 'a mind born from God and co-eternal with him' (*mens ex Deo nata et ipsi coaeterna*). Furthermore, Plato rightly knows the soul of the World to be older than any of its bodies.

From there Abelard goes on to speak about the liberal arts, especially about the fact that body and soul are linked in a harmony of perfect proportions. Arithmetic is the mother of all the arts, with its harmonious proportions being effortlessly transposed to the science of music. In an image that is familiar from William of Conches,

⁶⁶ See *Theologia christiana* I.60. For God to speak through animals (cf. the prophecy by Balaam's ass) rather than overconfident prophets echoes a kind of Dionysian strand in Abelard by which it is better to represent God by unlikeness than by likeness. Thus God can be represented by drunkenness.

Abelard speaks about the analogy of macro- and microcosm, with the World Soul performing the same tasks as the souls of humans do with regard to their respective bodies. Not unlike William, he is keenly aware that Plato's use of language in all this is ultimately integumental,⁶⁷ extending it by arguing that even Christ spoke in integumental language.⁶⁸ In a move that is altogether different from William, he even pushes the analogy of macro- and microcosm beyond the natural order of creation, whether that of the world or of humanity, to inform, or rather: reform the ecclesial sphere. Just as the world is one animated whole, due to the universal harmony of God's works, so the apostle Paul calls the church the body of Christ, that is, as long as it demonstrates unity through harmony (*concordia*).⁶⁹ The same reforming tendency as in the slight against corrupt ministers is here coming to the fore again, as Abelard sees the church's institutional manifestation as secondary to its soteriological calling. Pushing the analogy between the natural and the soteriological order even further, Abelard considers the position of the World Soul, placed as it is in the middle of the world, a special gesture of divine grace; in the same way God also chose Jerusalem, situated at the center of the world, as the place from which to propagate true religion.⁷⁰

Still, in *Theologia christiana* I Abelard generally seems to content himself with a careful deconstruction of key philosophical texts, as he pries them open to accord with his Christian interpretation. His frequent recourse to Macrobius is of special importance in this respect, as he draws on him for intellectual support. As Abelard repeatedly

⁶⁷ See e.g. *Theologia christiana* I.89; *Theol. chr.* I.97; *Theol. chr.* I.106, where Abelard speaks about *involutum*. In the latter passage Abelard argues that it would be totally ridiculous for Plato to speak about the world as a true animal. So he must intend this image to be an *integumentum*. On the use of *integumenta*, see chapter 2 above.

⁶⁸ See *Theologia christiana* I.105, CCCM 12: 116: *Iuxta quod et Veritas ipsa de integumento parabolarum suarum apostolis loquitur dicens: (...)*, follows a quotation from Mc 4:11–12.

⁶⁹ See *Theologia christiana* I.88.

⁷⁰ Abelard's and other early Christian and medieval apologies follow a different kind of reasoning on this point compared to modern apologies such as John Locke's. There the problem is more why God hid his great message in such a corner of the world, from which Christ had to spread it worldwide. See John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures* XIV, in: John Locke. *Writings on Religion*, ed. V. Nuovo (Oxford, 2002), 85–210 at 193–94. In Abelard's cosmology Jerusalem is still the undisputed center of the world, cf. *Theol. chr.* I.90.

points out, this ancient commentator embraced the explicit use of fable and myth for the purpose of talking about the soul or ethereal powers, while reserving similitudes and examples exclusively for the discussion of God and *Nous*. Abelard quotes Macrobius in *Theologia christiana* I.104:

We should not assume, however, that philosophers approve the use of fabulous narratives in all disputations. It is their custom to employ them when speaking about the Soul, or about spirits having dominion in the upper air. . . . But when the discussion aspires to treat of the Highest and Supreme of all gods . . . or to treat of mind or intellect, which the Greeks call *Nous* . . . when, I repeat, philosophers speak about these, the Supreme God and Mind, they shun the use of fabulous narratives. When they wish to assign attributes to these divinities that not only pass the bounds of speech but those of human comprehension as well, they resort to similes and analogies.⁷¹

When in *Theologia christiana* I.118 Abelard discloses the concurrence between the Platonic movement and Catholic faith,⁷² he admits to drawing this conclusion more on the basis of patristic than philosophical authority. The reason he consults pagan philosophers like Plato is because he feels supported by several distinguished authorities from the past, such as Augustine and Jerome. Having received their philosophy indirectly through the Fathers, he nevertheless proceeds by giving his own assessment. The fame of these ancient philosophers ultimately rests on two things for him. First, while their thought demonstrates a belief in the Trinity as Christianity's central theological doctrine, it furthermore suggests that Trinitarian speculation accords with universal reason. Second, they show us that there is indeed precedent for using the language of concealment to protect theological or philosophical truth.

Especially on this last point Abelard is eager to open up the language of pagan philosophy for Christian use, just as centuries earlier Augustine had designed a new hermeneutic to open up the

⁷¹ See *Theologia christiana* I.104, CCCM 12: 114. The quotation is from Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis* I.2.13–14. I have used W.H. Stahl (trans.), *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio by Macrobius* (1952; New York, 1990), 85–86.

⁷² See *Theologia christiana* I.118, CCCM 12: 122: *Pluribus quoque sanctorum testimoniis didicimus Platoniam sectam Catholicæ fidei concordare* ('We have learnt from numerous account of the saints that the Platonic movement and Catholic faith are in accordance'). Cf. *Theol. chr.* I.112 on Vergil and Macrobius.

language of Scripture in his *On Christian Doctrine*.⁷³ Abelard's suggestions are in accordance with this, as the reading of Plato requires exegetical skills alongside of hermeneutical discretion. Thus he makes semi-exegetical comments, to the effect that 'when these matters cannot be explained truthfully or conveniently, the letter of the text forces us to a mystical interpretation'.⁷⁴ Throughout all this he clearly considers the points of convergence between Platonic philosophy and traditional Christian thought to be of such overriding importance that more controversial points may be passed by in silence, such as the fact that Plato sees both Word and Spirit as created.⁷⁵

Hence, we arrive at the anomalous situation, at least from a contemporary Christian perspective, that Plato and Macrobius are regarded as nearly orthodox in a particular twelfth-century way, while the Jews are evidently not. This may in part be explained by the fact that, ever since Christianity's acceptance of the Old Testament, especially as it was subsequently enhanced by the identification of Carolingian rulers with Old Testament kings, the Jewish heritage had become increasingly integrated with the development of Christianity, to the point where its legacy was almost fully absorbed. Still, it remains peculiarly unsettling, even against the background of a shared heritage of familiar Old Testament prophecies, that the Jews of Abelard's day were increasingly forced into positions of societal and intellectual 'otherness'.⁷⁶ Speaking to a deeper fault-line of the medieval mind, the question why the reception of Jewish sources

⁷³ On Augustine's hermeneutic, see K. Pollmann, *Doctrina christiana. Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der christlichen Hermeneutik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustinus, De doctrina christiana* (Freiburg, 1996), 66–244.

⁷⁴ See *Theologia christiana* I.117, CCCM 12: 122.

⁷⁵ See *Theologia christiana* I.113, CCCM 12: 119: 'When it is occasionally said by the philosophers about God or the Mind that they are born or created and that the soul is made, this is more an abuse of words than an error of judgment'.

⁷⁶ Abelard's intentional ethics allows him to be more positive about Judaism than most twelfth-century authors, as he does not hold the Jews responsible for killing Christ in fault but only in deed, see e.g. *Ethica*, ed. and transl. Luscombe, 66: 'And so we say that those who persecuted Christ or his disciples, who they thought should be persecuted, sinned in deed, yet they would have sinned more gravely in fault if they had spared them against their own conscience'. In this respect his *Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian* is especially important, since it shows how Abelard takes Jewish faith seriously as an intellectual position, even if he still places it beneath the Christian truth. See on this A. Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London, 1995), 90–91, 124.

was so much more troubling than that of pagan sources is a mystery that cannot be solved by looking to Abelard alone.

This does not make his embrace of pagan sources any less remarkable. In the same way as Plato and Macrobius, it seems that Vergil and the Sibyl also receive a new lease on life. But for all the intellectual help the philosophers give to Abelard, there is a price to be paid as well. This becomes clear when, in a last attempt, Abelard feels pushed to defend his use of pagan arguments once again. He does so by comparing pagan philosophers to, of all biblical people, Caiaphas. In a surprising twist, however, Caiaphas is not depicted as a Jew, in terms of religious ancestry, but as a prophet, in soteriological terms, as his betrayal—*felix culpa*—was ultimately for the best. After all, he did not utter his infamous prophecy that it is better for one man to die than for a whole race to perish on his own initiative, but because the Holy Spirit made him say so.⁷⁷ Abelard detects a similarly oblique prophetic pattern in the way in which pagan authors adumbrate the mysteries of Christianity. However agreeable and broad-minded his interpretation, however, the question that inevitably arises is whether a traitor can be fully trustworthy. Perhaps to offset the potential betrayal harbored by his pagan spokesmen, a betrayal of which he himself was repeatedly accused, Abelard puts repeated stress on their ascetic and continent lifestyles.

While still in the process of discussing his pagan sources, Abelard begins to shift the weight of his arguments from an epistemological discussion of the Trinity to a soteriological discussion of the incarnation of the Word. His attention to Vergil and the prophecies of the Sibyl, both of whom in his universal world view become important ambassadors of Christ, have already prepared this shift. In *Theologia christiana* II Abelard comments on the fittingness of quoting not just pagan but also heretical sources even further. Again his approach owes much to the traditional defense strategies employed by Jerome and Augustine, with Jerome arguing that Christians can use secular wisdom, just as the Jews may take a non-Jewish woman for a wife, having first taken her captive and shaven her head, and Augustine conceding similarly that Christians had special divine

⁷⁷ See *Theologia christiana* I.117, CCCM 12: 121: '...let him pay attention to that prophecy by Caiaphas, which the Holy Spirit put forth through him, destining it to a far different meaning than its promulgator intended'.

permission to take the riches on their flight from Egypt.⁷⁸ To the extent that he actually employs pagan sources, Abelard may well have mimicked patristic strategy. But what seems to concern him more than the contaminating effect on faithful Christians of pagan resources, bringing him to a point where he goes his own separate course, is the actual possibility, and plausibility, of their redemptive power. For that, however, it is absolutely necessary that these pagan authors had somehow access to the incarnation. The way in which Abelard broaches this problem is by cleverly inverting the question. Could it even be, so he suggests, that this was not the case, given that they had knowledge about the Trinity and lived perfectly continent lives?

But who is to assert that faith in the incarnation was revealed to none of them . . . even though it does not seem to find expression in their scriptures? . . . But if it is permissible to accept also the sayings of philosophers allegorically, who can fail to observe that Plato's statement that God in the very composition of the world has applied two longitudinal lines in the image of the Greek letter CHI and curved them into the orbit so as to perfect the globe should be conveniently redirected to the mystery of the world's redemption? It is as if it mystically reveals that the salvation of all humanity, which we understand to be the true constitution of the world itself, was consummated in the passion of the Lord's cross.⁷⁹

Just as Job did not have to live by Jewish law to merit salvation, in the same way pagan philosophers living before Christ's birth did not need to partake of the sacraments, while they could yet be saved. Evidence that this may indeed be so is found in the fact that they were able to live out rationally what biblical law imposed on Christians positively. Not only the philosophers can thus be saved, but uneducated simple folk as well, men and women alike, inasmuch as they live out through natural law what God conferred on Christians through grace and the sacraments.

In contradistinction to the defense of natural law found in William of Conches, Abelard does not merely want to lay down the pattern

⁷⁸ See e.g. *Theologia christiana* II.118 (on Augustine). On this topic, see also G.R. Evans, *Philosophy and Theology in the Middle Ages* (London, 1993), 10–16.

⁷⁹ See *Theologia christiana* II.15–16, CCCM 12: 140. See on this passage, L. Moonan, 'Abelard's Use of the *Timaeus*,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 56 (1989): 36–37. According to Moonan, Abelard's accommodation here of Plato's imagery in *Timaeus* 36b–c echoes Justin Martyr in *Apology* I.60.

of natural justice.⁸⁰ Nor does he intend to unravel the harmonious beauty of creation, for that matter. Ultimately, his point is that natural law, whatever other purposes it may have, reveals before all the goodness of the will of the creator. In this regard, Abelard places Plato slightly higher even than Moses, because the former confers more explicit praise on divine will as the cause of all things:

Plato states that this is the best and ineffable creator of all things who, although he could do all things and all envy is far removed from him, yet created all things so good as the nature of individual things permitted, or the order and harmony of things required. Moses also said that all things were made very good by God. But Plato seems to assign a little more praise to divine goodness, when he says it to have made individual things so good as their nature permitted or it was found opportune. He further added that God's will is rightly held to be the cause of all created things, as if he understood all things to be made and made excellently for this reason, namely that the best creator whose unbreakable will suffices for all things had decreed that they be made such.⁸¹

In the final analysis Abelard brings Plato's legacy home, so to speak, by connecting it to Augustine's in a monotheistic marriage of sorts. Upon reflection, he does not seem to regard Plato's position as substantially different from that of Augustine in *Encheiridion* 11: 'It is sufficient for a Christian to believe that the goodness of the Creator, who is one God, is the cause of all created things and that there is no nature which is not God or made by God'.⁸² Collapsing philosophical into patristic authority, he manages to forge an intellectual genealogy strong enough to uphold whatever claims his universalizing view of Christian knowledge will make him enunciate.

Yet intellectual strength does not thereby confer moral rectitude. From the fact that all things are established by the will of the creator, rather than his intellect, it follows that one needs to ascend

⁸⁰ Remarkably, in his actual exegesis of Genesis Abelard does not much depart from William of Conches' position in seeing God as responsible for the skeletal outfit of creation, as it were, after which the *vis naturae* runs the universe by divine consent. See *Expositio in Hexaemeron*, PL 178: 746D: 'We call nature the power of things conferred upon them on account of that first preparation so that thereafter a thing may be born, that is, that nature's power suffices to effect it.'

⁸¹ See *Theologia christiana* II.29, CCCM 12: 144.

⁸² See *Theologia christiana* II.30, CCCM 12: 144: *Satis est Christiano rerum creatarum causam nonnisi credere bonitatem creatoris, qui est Deus unus, nullamque esse naturam quae non aut ipse sit aut ab ipso.*

with a purged mind, as knowledge and self-knowledge—as this is also how Abelard subtitles his *Ethics*—are inseparably connected, just as logic and metaphor. With philosophy seen as a life removed from the senses, it is marked by a deep commitment to the intellect. But an interest in ethics does not thereby imply that one is also ethical. Abelard deems it rather fitting, therefore, that the great sage Pythagoras preferred to be called lover of wisdom (*philosophus*) rather than wise man (*sophus*), since only God is truly wise. And, shrewdly playing on Pythagoras' being a non-Christian as well as alluding to his own teaching excellence, he contrasts this with Jesus' reference to the heavenly teacher in Matthew 23:10, stating that Jesus would have thought it less arrogant to claim himself to be wise than to usurp the name of Master.⁸³

This incidental comment points us once again to the true reason why the incarnation is so important for Abelard in book II. True wisdom is only revealed in the incarnate Christ. Only if one is able to emulate his standards, if not those of his divine intellect than at least his exemplary humble life, can one hope to attain wisdom. It is clearly not just knowledge and erudition that count for Abelard, as he assigns an equally respectable place to moral virtues like humility, simplicity of life, continence and so on. To the extent that the lives of philosophers such as Pythagoras manifest all this in ways that approximate evangelical and apostolic perfection, such texts barely differ from undiluted Christian teaching. Just as it is obvious that one need not claim a philosophical pedigree for Christ, so it should likewise not be claimed that philosophers match the perfection of Christ the Redeemer. If philosophers somehow fall short in showing redemptive power, it is not on the point of their intellect or right understanding. Much as Abelard may not be able to retrace their thought, he is able through a sophisticated hermeneutic to decode their texts in such a way that they conform seamlessly to Christian doctrine.

Yet where the philosophers prove truly unable to guide him towards the wisdom embodied by Christ, representing wisdom in its purest and most perfect form, is in their inability to renounce self-will. Abelard locates the glaring divergence between their so-called

⁸³ See *Theologia christiana* II.38, CCCM 12, 148: *Minus quippe ei esset sapientis nomen quam magistri sibi arrogare.*

philosophical knowledge and their knowledge of self precisely on the point of their radical insistence on intellectual self-control. As a direct result of this, however, they are always in danger of falling victim to despair, as the sin *par excellence*. Abelard's evident fear of despair, his forced attempts to dispel such feelings as much as he can, may well explain why he indulges in giving examples of suicide. The most ironic case is that of Diogenes the Cynic who killed himself not so much in order to die as to kill the fever which prevented him from attending the Olympic Games.⁸⁴ Such tales allow him to demonstrate how philosophers must inevitably fail at perfection not because of any perceived lack of knowledge but because of an endemic lack of hope.⁸⁵ More than reflecting on their personal plight alone, it is their residual lack of hope, which ultimately undermines the efficacy of their thought to him. With their intellectual pride showing them at odds with his proposed advancement of knowledge, it seems that their thought must eventually also be rejected.

V B. *Christ's Incarnation according to the Commentary on Romans*

Throughout the course of his *Theologia christiana* Abelard's expositions on the Trinity become gradually more charged, bringing in the issue of salvation, than was evident in *Theologia 'Summi boni'*. Compared to the earlier *Theology*, his discourse in *Theologia christiana* displays more urgency, as we find him even dealing with 'life-threatening' issues, as in the case of the philosophers' suicide. And yet he forces himself, as he does all along, to play out the different tensions on the horizontal plane of human language until they are properly solved and settled. Hence, as readers we have to be prepared to unravel many an intellectual knot.

⁸⁴ For an excellent treatment of this theme in Abelard, see P. Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages c. 200–c. 1150* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 254–66. The case of Diogenes is found in *Theologia christiana* II.77. For Abelard's discussion, see *Theologia christiana* II.81–86.

⁸⁵ My emphasis here is different from Cramer's. As Cramer states, the problem with ancient philosophers is that they act out of hope for a life of endless perfection, thereby allowing hope to become a passion, see Cramer, *Baptism and Change*, p. 265. This is a different kind of hope (*spes*) than is described at the opening of *Theologia 'Scholarium'*.

The urgency of his subject matter forces him to be more specific about the appropriateness of different uses of language. As we already saw in his discussion of Macrobius, this commentator accepted fable and myth when speaking about the soul and ethereal powers, while urging the use of similitudes when dealing with God himself. Discussing the lives of philosophers in book II, Abelard seems more negative about fables than before, associating them with the deception of poetry, and contrasting them generally with the truth mediated by philosophy. After all, is it not true that Plato did not allow poets in his ideal city? Poetry is for children, as Isidore of Seville said. The reason for Abelard's more negative attitude here may again lie in a heightened sense of urgency, as one's sayings should be absolutely truthful. Interestingly, we find Abelard quoting here from Jerome, who praised the emperor Titus, Vespasian's son, for blaming himself when he had wasted a day. As Abelard quotes Jerome:

We think that we do not waste an hour, a day, moments, time, ages, when we speak *an idle word* for which we will have to *account on the day of reckoning* (Matth. 12:36). But if he (scil. Titus) naturally said and did this without the law, without the gospel, without the teaching of the Savior and the apostles, what would it behoove us to do . . . ?⁸⁶

It is as if Abelard wants to make sure that his treatises do not contain empty words (*otiosa verba*), not just because in contrast to Titus he has the Law, the Gospel and the doctrine of Christ and the apostles available but perhaps even more because of an underlying historical awareness. The time span that separates him from the day of judgment is much shorter than for Titus, who lived shortly after Christ's first coming. This approaching sense of the end gives Abelard's logic a dynamic thrust. Over and against the study of poetry, which may contain empty words, he recommends studying the liberal arts, notably the art of dialectic. Together with arithmetic, Augustine had characterized dialectic as moving away from the bodily senses, belonging to reason alone. For Abelard, as ultimately also for Augustine, dialectic, much more than arithmetic, is the mother of all disciplines (*disciplina disciplinarum*). Dialectic is the one art that teaches us to teach, as he quotes Augustine, the one art also which teaches us to

⁸⁶ See *Theologia christiana* II.109, CCCM 12: 181. The quotation is from Jerome's *Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians* III.6.10.

learn.⁸⁷ Dialectic, in other words, is the one truly dynamic art, as it never comes to rest.

Given his growing interest in the moral aspect of knowledge, Abelard surprises us for a moment when he considers Scripture as outweighing pagan teaching because it contains superior knowledge of the liberal arts and of philosophy. Instead of poetic deception, Scripture offers us true knowledge. But this truth applies only insofar as one realizes that it revolves around the bearer of this wisdom *par excellence*, Christ. In this respect it is extremely interesting, as Abelard goes on to clarify, that not even Christ was free to choose his own channels of communicating revelation:

If it pleases a Christian to acquire more erudite expressions and sentences, can this not altogether be done openly without applying oneself to poetic figments and inane fabulations? Which are the sorts of locutions, the embellishment of words that are not found on the sacred page, especially as it is dished out with parabolic and allegorical mysteries and overflowing almost everywhere with mystical coverings? Which are the sophisticated locutions that the mother of tongues, the Hebrew, has not taught, especially when it is known that the people of Palestine were used to parables, so that the Lord Jesus himself was also obliged to speak in parables when preaching the Gospel?⁸⁸

It is clear from this passage that the Bible is the source of all refinement, i.e., of all refined speech. Yet in reading the Bible, Christ's role is so central that Abelard transforms the natural or historical order into his own view of salvation history, eliminating any distinctions between them, even when logically they might lead him in opposite directions. Thus Abelard argues on the historical level that Christ needed to speak in parables to bring his message across to a people used to figurative speech, as the Hebrew language contained them. By contrast, we can only know that Christ spoke in parables from the perspective of salvation history. For only when confessing Him to be wisdom revealed can one gain the knowledge needed to unpack these parables. With the natural and the soteriological sphere conflated, making a distinction between them does not help us to gain more insight into the structure of Abelard's Christology.

⁸⁷ See *Theologia christiana* II, 117, CCCM 12: 184–85, with reference to Augustine's *De ordine* II.13: *Disciplina disciplinarum, quam dialecticam uocant. Haec docet docere, haec docet discere* ('The discipline of disciplines, which they call dialectics. It teaches teaching, it teaches learning').

⁸⁸ See *Theologia christiana* II.126, CCCM 12: 191.

To stay with Abelard's own imagery we might try to state the matter differently. Rather than saying that the natural and the soteriological order are conflated, it appears as if in the figure of Christ *res* and *signum* or, substituting Boethian-Abelardian for Augustinian terminology here, *res* and *verbum* coalesce for Abelard. Christ is wisdom itself; and because he is wisdom, he also speaks wisdom, as he reveals himself to us in what he speaks. Abelard's simultaneous interest in both logic and metaphor can ultimately be traced back to a single root, namely the mystery of Christ as being both *res* and *verbum* at the same time. But while Christ symbolizes the source and content of all knowledge, how this knowledge is mediated truthfully from its divine origin to its manifestation in human history remains a problem.

It is apposite at this point to follow Abelard's direct reflections on the question of the incarnation found in his *Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans*. Naturally, Abelard's priorities are different from what we have found so far, as in a biblical commentary the soteriological dimension takes precedence over the conventional patterns of human discourse. But this time we cannot solve the matter by trying to distinguish between various genres or deciphering the different language games that are played out between the disciplines of theology and logic. For it appears as if the very impossibility of tackling the soteriological question from the perspective of natural language, trying to find similitudes that are appropriate, is a matter of absolute principle for Abelard. Here we seem to arrive not just at one of these intellectual knots, but at the intellectual knot *par excellence*, as it defies any and all attempts at unraveling. As he states in book I 725:

For by no means could the mystery of the incarnation be conceived by human reason from the visible works of God, in the same way as God's power and his wisdom and his benignity were clearly perceived based on what they saw. In these three I believe that the entire distinction of the Trinity consists.⁸⁹

Abelard is evidently convinced that the problem of the incarnation cannot be reduced to a problem of logical predication in the same way as he confidently analyzed the concept of Trinity. And yet, he

⁸⁹ See *Commentary on Romans* I (1:20), ed. Buytaert, CCCM 11: 68.

wants to remain steadfastly true to his earlier principles of solving everything on the plane of human language. This crucial quandary of Abelardian theologic may explain why he emphatically sees Christ not just as *embodying* wisdom but also as *speaking* wisdom, with the semantic implications of Christ's role as *Verbum* remaining extremely important all along in the unfolding of his soteriological scheme.

The substantive or 'real' (cf. *res*) turning point, however, in Abelard's view of humanity's redemption seems to lie in its—heretofore implicit—relational aspect. Having found a first expression in Abelard's insistence on Christ's role as a teacher, this relational aspect is stressed even further by his conclusion, which poses as an injunction, that after his passion Christ be loved more than before, based on the truism that a realized gift is more than one only hoped for:

He will be more righteous, that is, more loving of God, after Christ's passion than before, because a completed benefice kindles more love than one that is hoped for.⁹⁰

Obviously, the only one who can instill any reliable hope in human beings is Christ himself, since he first taught them wisdom. Abelard says as much, when he calls on Christ's testimony: 'He testifies that he has come to kindle in human beings this true freedom of love'.⁹¹ In the same context we find him making mention of Christ's testimony again: *ipso attestante*. While his recourse to Christ's testimony may be seen as a typical elaboration of the twelfth-century educational principle of *docere verbo et exemplo*,⁹² revealing the broadly monastic character of early medieval teaching, it also manifests his keen interest in maintaining his original approach of solving the problem of incarnation and redemption on the horizontal plane of language, just as he had done with the Trinity.

If we insert Abelard's soteriology in the development of high medieval theology, his approach seems to mark a clear step beyond Anselm's interpretation, focused on the *res per se*, that is, on the satisfaction brought about by the God-Man. For Abelard, on the other

⁹⁰ See *Commentary on Romans* II (3:26), CCCM 11: 118. The entire question on redemption and justification is found in CCCM 11: 117–18.

⁹¹ See *Commentary on Romans* II (3:26), CCCM 11: 118: *Ad hanc itaque ueram caritatis libertatem in hominibus propagandam se uenisse testatur.*

⁹² See C. Walker Bynum, *Docere Verbo et Exemplo*. See also her *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982), 22–58.

hand, Christ's teaching—in addition to the self-sufficient *res* of his sacrifice—begins to serve as a sign of its own, yet a sign which is relevant only insofar as it is received. This makes Christ's teaching a *verbum* in more ways than one. Not only does his word or teaching give us access to the understanding of his sacrifice, but this sacrifice is at the same time the exclusive property of the divine person who is called Word. While it obviously goes too far to see the insistence on Christ as teacher as expressive of Abelard's interest in the historical Jesus, there yet is a sense in which the importance of Christ's teaching stretches beyond his messianic office. Seen as integral to the understanding of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, his teaching becomes an identifiable aspect of it.

And yet, just as Anselm before him, Abelard desires before all to give a substantive interpretation of Christ's redemption, one that is coextensive with the vicariousness of his death, by which he redeemed humanity, atoning for its sins. The only fitting language in which to express this mystery would seem to be the language of Scripture. But biblical language is at the same time part of the enduring mystery itself, to the extent that it conceals Christ's redemption as much as revealing it.⁹³ While Anselm took on the challenge of trying to explain this mystery in Christ's absence (*Christo remoto*), Abelard's preferred strategy is to hide behind his own testimony (*ipso attestante*). This also explains why his soteriology *stricto sensu*, unlike his Trinitarian speculations, is embedded in an exegetical commentary. But how can he guarantee that his interpretation is not just a tautological 'tour de force', as exegetical readings often are, feeding off of the message of Scripture while not giving anything back? In other words, how does he make sure that his interpretation really captures the *res* of Christ's sacrifice, as regards both its self-sufficiency and its relational quality?

⁹³ On the impenetrability of biblical language and the resulting parallelism between biblical language and poetry, see P. von Moos, 'Literary Aesthetics in the Latin Middle Ages: The Rhetorical Theology of Peter Abelard', in: C.J. Mews, C.J. Nederman, R.M. Thomson (eds), *Rhetoric and Renewal in the Latin West, 1100–1540*. Essays in Honour of John O. Ward (Turnhout, 2003), 81–97. On p. 89 Von Moos writes: 'The deepest justification for a rhetorical approach to the Bible lies, for Abelard, in the paradox that God is inexpressible, indeed unfathomable, but that revelation nevertheless speaks about him, in a language which can be best understood with the aid of the descriptive repertoire made available by the art of eloquence'.

To answer this, we need to look more closely at his interpretation of the famous question on the redemption as accomplished by Christ's death: *quae sit ista nostra redemptio per mortem Christi*? As we already saw, the turning point of Abelard's interpretation lies in its relational quality, as human beings cannot fail to love Christ more after his passion than before. For Abelard this implies that, to the extent that Christ has accomplished humanity's redemption, to that extent it must revert back to him. This can only be done by means of a responsive human love, one which does not just liberate us from sin but grants us the freedom of divine sonship:

So our redemption consists in that highest love in us brought on by Christ's passion which not only frees us from the slavery of sin, but acquires for us the true freedom of being God's sons. Consequently, we shall fulfill all things more out of love for him than out of fear, as he exhibited such mercy that, as he himself testifies, a greater grace cannot be found. *No one has greater love than this, he says, that someone lays down his life for his friends* (John 15:13).⁹⁴

The state of redemption is characterized by humanity's true love of Christ, which must be based on freedom and not on fear. It cannot even be rooted in freedom from fear. This last distinction by which Abelard appears to separate freedom from fear from fear itself, while it may seem slight, is yet of crucial importance, since freedom from fear can never be an adequate basis for the true freedom of love (*vera libertas caritatis*). To warrant that true freedom of love can indeed exist, Abelard makes a relatively long detour which leads him first to stress Adam's innocence *coram Deo* in the face of the devil's grip on him. This allows him to clarify that the *seductor* rather than the *seductus* is deserving of punishment. Only thereafter do we find him stressing the event of Christ's death, which is after all an innocent one. Rather than reconciling humanity to God, however, Christ's death compounds Adam's guilt *coram Deo*. Abelard formulates this particular intellectual knot in a most striking way: 'Are we in this sense not made more righteous through the death of the Son of God than we were before, namely that before we required liberation from punishment?'⁹⁵

⁹⁴ See *Commentary on Romans* II (3:26), CCCM 11: 118.

⁹⁵ See *Commentary on Romans* II (3:26), CCCM 11: 117: *In quo etiam iustiores facti sumus per mortem Filii Dei quam ante eramus, ut a poenis iam liberari debeamus?*

His answer, finally, is as follows:

For it seems to us that in this we are justified in Christ's blood and reconciled to God, that through this singular grace exhibited to us, namely that his own Son took on our nature, and by persisting to teach us in this same nature by word and example until death, he has bound us so much to himself through love that, kindled by such a great work of divine grace, our true love shall not fear to bear anything on his account.⁹⁶

By stating that true love shall not fear to bear anything on his account, Abelard claims in the final analysis that true love does not just put an end to fear, but actually cancels it out.⁹⁷ True love thus makes us both justified (*iustificati*) and more righteous (*iustiores*) at the same time, as justice is based on Christ's love for us rather than on a distributive pattern of meting out guilt or innocence. According to Abelard, Christ's love for humanity simply cannot fail to kindle a similar kind of love in us. Based as it is on the creative justice of divine grace rather than on natural justice, this love should spawn ever more justice.

It is as if Abelard slowly unties the crucial intellectual knot of Christ's saving work (i.e., his incarnation-*cum*-redemption), in which *verbum* and *res* prove hardest to unravel, by opening it up here as a full-blown moral one. Justice and innocence, sin and grace become the separate problem pairs that he will address in his ethical works. Ironically, however, the crucial difference wrought by Christ's redemption is precisely that it makes it again possible for Abelard to fight out this moral battle on the plane of human language. After all, do not the effects of the incarnation also include the redemption of human discourse?⁹⁸ We will therefore have to be prepared in the next chapter to discuss all things on the horizontal plane of *vocabula*, as Abelard struggles with the set of problems commonly associated with the role of divine providence.

⁹⁶ See *Commentary on Romans* II (3:26), CCCM 11: 117.

⁹⁷ Cf. Anselm's first meditation *Terret me vita mea*, where fear and salvation keep each other in check, to the extent that they presuppose each other. On this meditation, see M.B. Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity. Essays on the Poetics of Monasticism* (Stanford, 2003), 107–35 (Anselm and the Art of Despair).

⁹⁸ See M.L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language*, rev. ed., 7–54. Her paradigmatic analysis of Augustine here would seem to apply in large part to Abelard as well, especially the part about the functions of redeemed speech.

As said, in the next chapter we shall give more explicit attention to Abelard's ethics. To begin, we will concentrate again on Abelard's *ingenium*. This time, however, our focus is on the dilemma of logic and grace rather than on that of talent and tradition. To finish our survey of his 'Theologies', we will also include an explicit excursion on his *Theologia 'Scholarium'*. Striving for the integration of his different strands of thought, Abelard combines his previous arguments in an overarching theology of divine providence, even though in good Abelardian fashion it remains conspicuously unfinished. It nevertheless seems true that Abelard develops a new perspective here, one in which the logical and the theological are on the verge of becoming harmonized in ways not seen before in twelfth-century thought.

CHAPTER FIVE

FORTUNE OR FAILURE: THE PROBLEM OF GRACE, FREE WILL AND PROVIDENCE IN PETER ABELARD

I *Introduction: Abelard and the Problem of Medieval Rationalism*

In a lucid and compelling essay, L.M. de Rijk has praised Peter Abelard not for his ingenuity, but rather for the acuity of his talent, for what is called his *acumen ingenii*. Abelard lived by logic, according to De Rijk, with logic being as much a life's passion as an art for this master dialectician. The essay deals with Abelard's handling of universals as well as with his ethics, demonstrating how Abelard was able to pry open some of the toughest questions facing his generation.¹ In conformity with this line of approach, the previous chapter tried to show how most of these questions had been handed down since late antiquity, since the time of Augustine and Boethius, as they were merely beginning to get a new treatment in the twelfth century. But De Rijk goes further in his assessment, and we should heed his carefully formulated remarks here, as he argues how for Abelard logic is truly indispensable. In the last instance, as he summarizes his hero's intellectual position, logic acts as the judge in every philosophical or theological debate, not because it is either theological or philosophical but because first of all it is a debate.²

One would perhaps expect De Rijk to end it here, as one can hardly expect a better insight in and more praise for Abelard's logical qualities than to point to his debating skills. But De Rijk still

¹ See L.M. de Rijk, *Pierre Abélard (1079–1142). Scherpzinnigheid als hartstocht*, Akademie van Wetenschappen afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks 44 no. 4 (Amsterdam, 1980), 1–47. For shorter and/or alternative versions of this text in German and English respectively, see L.M. de Rijk, 'Peter Abälard (1079–1142): Meister und Opfer des Scharfsinns,' in: R. Thomas e.a. (ed.), *Petrus Abaelardus (1079–1142). Person, Werk und Wirkung*, Trierer Theologische Studien Bd. 38 (Trier, 1980), 125–138 and 'Abelard and Moral Philosophy,' *Medioevo* 12 (1986): 1–27. Where applicable, I shall refer to the German and English versions.

² See De Rijk, *Scherpzinnigheid als hartstocht*, 46, 'Meister und Opfer,' 131, 'Abelard and Moral Philosophy,' 26.

pushes things further, quoting a passage from Abelard's fourth book on *Dialectic*. In it Abelard states explicitly how divine grace has conferred knowledge of logic only upon a few. While this comment is on the surface meant as a criticism of Bernard of Clairvaux and his companions, in De Rijk's opinion it reveals how on a deeper level Abelard sees logic clearly as a kind of divine grace.³ The importance of logic in Abelard is oddly enhanced for De Rijk by his seeing it as divine grace. It is intriguing that De Rijk ends his article precisely on this point. Despite all Abelard's vital ideas, which the essay has described at great length, a divine blessing at the end, like an *ite, missa est* at the end of mass, is deemed indispensable, if not to bring out the force of Abelard's logic, then surely to communicate the revolutionary impact it had on his medieval contemporaries. For this is how De Rijk wants to see Abelard: as opening the way for a more secular approach to knowledge, one focusing on dialectical method rather than on promoting Christian doctrine. For De Rijk, Abelard's approach culminates in the flowering of speculative grammar in the late medieval period, with philosophy outshining theology in a way that foreshadows the turn to modernity.

Focusing on the structure of De Rijk's article in this way helps us to shed light on what is in fact a deeper seated problem, namely the problem how to assess the Christian nature of Abelard's thought. Although De Rijk avoids simplified abstractions, such as the view of Abelard as a medieval Voltaire, an iconoclastic forerunner of the European Enlightenment, he argues with full force that logic absorbs everything for Abelard, even taking priority over Scripture. Logic qualifies human beings, therefore. It distinguishes especially Abelard's fierce intellect, as it provides him with the tools to interpret nature first, only thereafter to resort to the exegesis of Scripture, which requires additional explanation and interpretation.⁴

Still, one may ask whether De Rijk's analysis fully supports his contentions. As an example we may look to his point of the subservience of Scripture. As he walks us through much of the *Ethics*,

³ See De Rijk, *Scherpzinnigheid*, 46, 'Meister und Opfer,' 130–31, 'Abelard and Moral Philosophy,' 26: 'It is evident what Abelard has to say: logic is a gift of Divine Grace.'

⁴ See De Rijk, *Scherpzinnigheid*, 44, 'Abelard and Moral Philosophy', 23: 'It is evident that, according to Abelard, it is man who explains nature and the Scriptures (in that order, I believe) by using his natural faculties.'

De Rijk refers us periodically to the various passages which Abelard draws from Scripture, as these enable him to underline his chosen moral position. The reason Abelard freely quotes from Scripture, however, is not simply because these biblical examples offer such nice illustrations of his arguments, but because they provide him with a succinct summation of his deepest ethical ideas; it may even be that this is where they originate. Some scriptural sayings lie at the very heart of his convictions, containing his arguments as if compressed in a nutshell. This is the case, for example, with the famous saying of Christ (*sic!*) condemning those who commit adultery in their hearts alongside those who do so in actual fact. Peeling off their shell as if to bring out their relevance in full daylight, Abelard seems to assign these scriptural examples a constructive, and perhaps even constitutive, role in the conception and elaboration of his thoughts.⁵ If this insight is correct, it may not be so easy to distinguish between Abelard's use of the tool of logic on the one hand and his decision, on the other hand, to illustrate his arguments with the help of numerous biblical references. We have already seen how he does not distinguish structurally between his approach of Scripture in his 'Theologies' and his *Commentary on Romans*.

A similar difficulty arises with the professed priority of nature over Scripture.⁶ This is not to say that the order indicated by de Rijk must be reversed. As we have tried to show in chapter two, the twelfth century is rather marked by a remarkable equilibrium between Nature and Scripture, even if we gradually see it starting to slip. Moreover, the entire concept of order is problematic in the case of Abelard, as it contrasts with the general flexibility of his mindset. What we have before us is more a strong commitment to a continuous process of ordering, as Abelard feels sufficiently free to make

⁵ It appears that in his selection of scriptural passages (e.g. about adultery in Matth. 5:28), as in his general choice of examples, there lurks an autobiographical undertone in Abelard's reasoning. It is not so much my concern here to find out whether this is deliberate or not, but rather to show how such examples give his reasoning in both the *Ethics* and the various *Planctus* a particular urgency, heightening the significance of these works. Below I shall quote Abelard's *Ethics* from D.E. Luscombe (ed.), *Peter Abelard's Ethics* (Oxford, 1971). In the Latin appendix below references will also be given to the Ilgner-edition in CCCM 190. The text of Abelard's *Planctus* is taken from W. Meyer, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur mittellateinischen Rhythmik* (1905; Hildesheim and New York, 1970), 340–74.

⁶ On the balance of Nature and Scripture in the twelfth century, see above chapter 2, pp. 51–55.

his own arrangement of authorities and arguments (*rationes*) without being hampered by any preconceived notions of hierarchy.⁷

While De Rijk may have pushed too far in his claim that Abelard received the gift of logic through the direct intervention of divine grace, he also leaves us with an image of Bernard that is not entirely convincing. For just as Abelard worked with Scripture in an astute manner that did not conflict with his proclaimed preference for nature, so Bernard may have had more logic in him than Abelard, or De Rijk for that matter, deemed possible. For all Bernard's public preference for scriptural authority instead of rational arguments, when he finally meets his opponent, if only on paper, as in the case of his famous Letter 190, it seems that his biblical quotations are neither as accurate nor as pertinent as those cited by Abelard in his *Ethics*.⁸ What enabled Bernard to triumph before the various ecclesiastical tribunals of his day was not the weight of the evidence, whether rational or scriptural. Bernard's victory was due to his successful strategy of silencing his opponent before he could engage in outright battle, as De Rijk does not fail to point out. But it was likewise due to the clever maneuvering by means of which he was able to dwarf himself at every occasion in an attempt to beat his over-inflated opponent.⁹ With Bernard painting himself as a poor soul so

⁷ This idea of a continuous process of ordering aptly describes Abelard's own method of working, which makes the dating of his writings a notoriously difficult problem. For a good evaluation of this problem, see C.J. Mews, 'On Dating the Works of Peter Abelard,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 52 (1985): 73–134, repr. in C.J. Mews, *Abelard and his Legacy* (Aldershot, 2001).

⁸ On scriptural and patristic authority in Abelard and Bernard with specific reference to Letter 190, see M.B. Pranger, 'Sic et Non: Patristic Authority Between Refusal and Acceptance: Anselm of Canterbury, Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux,' in: I. Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West. From the Carolingians to the Maurists* (Leiden, 1997), Vol. I: 165–93. On 187–88 Pranger states: 'Bernard's biblical references are no longer, or, more precisely, not yet 'Probestellen'. Their being quoted is supposed to have the reader participate in an ongoing discourse which, even if it is presented in the guise of an argument or debate, owes its continuity and consistency to the artful intentions and the manipulative skills of the writer.'

⁹ See e.g. Bernard's clever identification of himself with David battling Abelard as Goliath in letter 189, as highlighted by Michael T. Clanchy, *Peter Abelard. A Medieval Life* (Oxford, 1997), 143, 176. On this motif, see also W. Otten, 'Authority and Identity in the Transition from Monastic to Scholastic Theology: Peter Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux,' in: J. Frishman, W. Otten and G. Rouwhorst (eds), *Religious Identity and the Problem of Historical Foundation The Foundational Character of Authoritative Texts and Traditions in the History of Christianity* (Leiden, 2004), 349–368.

inspired by love for Christ that his empathy leads to identification, Abelard is pushed into the role of onlooker, a mere spectator of the suffering Christ, as the first step on the road to becoming his enemy.¹⁰ While Abelard may try to claim that Bernard lacks grace, to use De Rijk's imagery, Bernard's handling of the Abelard file demonstrates how the acuity of mind of this Cistercian abbot is as great and passionate as that of his opponent.

Although the above reflections help to nuance our impressions of both Abelard and Bernard, it does not make the assessment of the Christian nature of Abelard's thought any easier. Was Abelard perhaps more Christian than previously thought and Bernard less so? That may indeed be the direction in which one needs to go if looking for a solution that satisfactorily informs contemporary readers. But perhaps it is advisable not to enter on that road at all, as a competition in the arena of orthodoxy is simply not the right approach. We may have to content ourselves instead with a situation whereby Bernard and Abelard, while fierce opponents on the outside, are in many respects seen as much closer than was previously assumed.¹¹ Still, some of the insights offered by De Rijk can perhaps be of use to shed more light on the identity and difference of logic and grace in Abelard. Taking our starting-point in these very concepts, we will try to probe deeper into the complex set of problems constituting one of the perennial queries in Christian theology, i.e., the relationship between grace and free will. While this relationship, seen against the background of the history of Augustinianism, is more often than not treated as a non-relationship, with Augustine as the orthodox champion of grace and Pelagius as the dissenter who tries to salvage free will, our introduction via De Rijk's essay can offer us a more oblique, and hence a relatively fresh entry into this matter.

¹⁰ See *Epistola* 193, in: J. Leclercq, H. Rochais (eds), *S. Bernardi Opera Vol. VIII. Epistolae* (Rome, 1977), 44–45. In this short letter addressed to Ivo of Reims, Bernard portrays Abelard as directly attacking Christ: *Homo est egrediens mensuram suam, in sapientia verbi evacuans virtutem crucis Christi* ('He is a man going outside his measure, emptying in the wisdom of the word the power of Christ's cross').

¹¹ For a recent evaluation of their conflict set within its twelfth-century bounds, see P. Godman, *The Silent Masters. Latin Literature and Its Censors in the High Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2001), 3–31.

II *Logic and Grace: From Augustine to Peter Abelard*

By all available standards in Christian theology, logic and grace do not form a harmonious pair. Nor is their contrast one of natural opposites. Logic, or dialectic, can best be described as a kind of verbal wrestling, the art by which one tries to achieve what may be called a verbal capturing of reality. This is how we understood it in the previous chapter. Grace, on the other hand, especially when taken in an Augustinian sense, has to do with divine intervention, often of a transcendent nature, by which this reality is shown to be in God's hand(s). When applying the concept of grace to the development of history, personal or collective, grace easily transforms into predestination. And predestination is that form of grace with which the later Augustine, under threat of the Pelagian heresy, became intensely preoccupied.¹² Before surrendering to such well-known stereotypes, however, let us look more closely at how De Rijk's Abelardian pair of logic and grace fits with its Augustinian original.

When relating the concepts of logic and grace to a model that might look familiar to Augustine, two suggestions for further reflection immediately present themselves. Taking one's starting-point in the concept of logic, one might be inclined to compare this model to the Augustinian pair of *scientia* and *sapientia*.¹³ Undertaking such a comparison, one could interpret *scientia* as the equivalent of logic for Abelard,—not that they are in any way identical terms, with *scientia* pointing to Augustine's background in the encyclopedic culture of late antiquity and logic pointing ahead to the intellectual Aristotelianism that would follow Abelard—while *sapientia* would indicate knowledge as it is infused by divine grace. The latter observation means

¹² While I am well aware that Pelagianism, when taken in a technical sense, only applies to the conflict between Augustine and his opponent Pelagius on the meaning and scope of divine grace, in the history of Christian thought the Pelagian conflict centering on the possibility of a sinless life has had a notable tendency to spill over into the conflict about predestination. The roots of this tendency can be found in Augustine himself, as he returned to the issue of predestination in the context of the second Pelagian controversy (418–430). See A. Fitzgerald O.S.A. (ed.), *Augustine Through the Ages. An Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, 1999) s.v. Pelagius and Pelagianism (E. TeSelle, pp. 633–40); s.v. predestination (M. Lamberigts, 677–79, esp. 678).

¹³ On this distinction in Augustine's vocabulary, see H.I. Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (1958; Paris, 1983), 561–69. See also E. Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1949), 149–63.

for Augustine that *sapientia* is not to be attained fully in this life, as the term radiates a kind of eschatological charge. Still, as the ideal of *sapientia* is something to which one should always aspire, it functions as a measuring-rod, both ethical and intellectual. The presence of a certain 'unearthly' ring to it makes it especially valuable as an intellectual tool for Augustine. If one's *scientia* is not perfect, the *studium sapientiae* acts as a kind of compensation;¹⁴ after all, it is nourished by *fides* as much as by *ratio*. In the case of *sapientia*, however, the addition of faith to knowledge has the added effect of making human knowledge also more effective, through a kind of transcendent shortcut, even though wisdom is never transformed into a full-blown dependence on divine grace without a basis in humanity's natural understanding.

Taking our starting-point in the notion of grace, on the other hand, we may be drawn more to the earlier pair of grace and free will. The difficulty with this oppositional pair, which Augustine coined and so fiercely defended under the mounting pressure of Pelagius and his supporters, especially Julian of Eclanum, is that it has so shaped Christianity in the West that it is hard to come out from under its spell. If we reduce its importance to manageable proportions by comparing it to *scientia* and *sapientia*, the emphasis in the former pair may be less on the knowing than on the acting, with Augustine especially interested in how to make human action conform to divine commandment.¹⁵ With Augustine striving hard to be in conformity with God's will, human free will becomes inevitably connected to aberration. It takes on an element of randomness, reflecting an act of arbitrary decision making its choices suitable to its instincts rather than to its mind. Grace, on the other hand, takes on the meaning of an active guiding divine force, by which one is directed to rein in one's instincts so as not to hamper the execution of divine orders.

¹⁴ See Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique*, 567, who sees *studium sapientiae* as a kind of middle term between *scientia* and *sapientia*.

¹⁵ Despite many indications to the contrary in Augustine's work, it is important to heed Christopher Kirwan's advice that 'belief in free decision of the will is the main philosophical difference between him (scil. Augustine) and the Protestant Reformers.' See Chr. Kirwan, *Augustine* (London, 1989), 82.

Following the above analysis, the anti-Pelagian tendency of Augustine's later thought tends to dominate the discussion of his ethical viewpoints to the point where his theology is often sketched as one in which the extreme reliance on grace paralyzes any creative, ethical speculation. This is reinforced by Augustine's own remarks. For the good life, so he states, is a life in which the person living it is a sojourner in this life, a pilgrim who, while traveling to his homeland, finds himself roaming in a so-called *regio dissimilitudinis*.¹⁶ There is considerable doubt whether he can ever reach the homeland in this life, that is, whether the achievement of this goal must in the final analysis not be viewed as more eschatological, or psychological in an idealistic sense, than ethical, as the good life changes imperceptibly into the distant ideal of the beatific vision. This may explain why Augustine shows so little interest in elaborating structural answers for concrete ethical questions,¹⁷ with the single exception of the problem of lying—a problem found equally intriguing by Kant. His ultimate interest, so we are led to conclude, lies more with an 'ethics of the beyond'. To the extent that we are able to develop an insight in this matter at all, it falls under the heading of divine predestination. As a result of this, it seems we have a picture in which human free will is increasingly confused with random, if not licentious behavior, as we already noted above. The only way to counter it is through divine determinism, i.e., predestination. Anticipating the position of John Calvin more than reflecting the subtle dynamics of Augustinian thought, in which the relationship with God is both relational and hierarchical, the concept of predestination becomes the funnel through

¹⁶ See e.g. *Confessiones* VII.10, ed. Verheijen, CCL 27: 103: . . . *et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis*. . . ('and I found myself far from you in the region of unlikeness').

¹⁷ I forego a discussion of Augustine's sermons here, in which ethical discussion may in general be related more specifically to his juridical and pastoral roles as a bishop. It is interesting in this regard that Martha Nussbaum sees Augustine as not particularly interested in the ethical dimension of his work. See her *Therapy of Desire. Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, 1994), 18, where she describes the quandary of Augustinian ethics as follows: 'God has set up certain ethical standards; it is our job to do what God wants. Truth and God's grace are out there; but the ability to see ethical truth or to reach for grace is not something we can control. There is, therefore, no reliable method by which we can construct an ethical norm from the scrutiny of our deepest needs and responses and desires.' See also *Augustine Through the Ages*, s.v. Ethics, 320–30; s.v. Mendacio, De/Contra mendacium, 555–57 (B. Ramsey O.P.).

which God dispenses divine grace on this earth in anticipation of the future life to be enjoyed in the hereafter.¹⁸

While this 'predestinarian cloud' overshadows many an analysis of religious thought as it slowly developed from Augustine to Calvin, we should not let it conceal the fact that medieval thinkers could find numerous other ways for divine grace to manifest itself. I am thinking here of various discussions on the role of providence, especially in Gregory the Great and Boethius who, each in his own right, were perhaps as important as Augustine in contributing to what we now commonly call the medieval world view.¹⁹ Early medieval thought harbors in fact a plethora of different views on the relationship between the human agent and the divine creator/protector.²⁰ Still, in all those cases the relationship involved is ultimately of a vertical nature, requiring an act of worship to rather than an intimate dialogue with God. The fact that this is so should not be blamed entirely on Augustine, although his influence on later debates was in many respects crucial. But it is true that in the aftermath of Augustine any retrospective endeavor to draw a clear comparison between such categories as grace and free will is complicated by the fact of their basic asymmetry. This asymmetry penetrates medieval models of providence as much as those of predestination to the point where their suitability for theological analysis is gravely affected.

In my view the relevance of Abelard's ethical stance comes in precisely on the point of this endemic asymmetry. Given its traditional medieval framework, in which the relationship between the human agent and the divine creator/protector is by definition a vertical one,—in view of later nominalist developments, one might argue,

¹⁸ See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* III.XXI (on double predestination) and XXIV (on effectual calling), trans. H. Beveridge (Grand Rapids, 1995), 202–11; 239–58.

¹⁹ On providence and free will in Boethius, see H. Chadwick, *Boethius. The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford, 1981), 242–47. See also A.W. Astell, *Job, Boethius and Epic Truth* (Ithaca, 1994) *passim*. On the notion of *constantia mentis* as Gregory the Great's attempt to keep one's balance in the midst of adversity, see C. Straw, *Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley, 1988), 236–56.

²⁰ One may think here generally of the works by Johannes Scottus Eriugena (cf. *De divina praedestinatione* and *Periphyseon*) and Anselm of Canterbury (cf. *Cur Deus Homo*; *De originali peccato* and *De casu diaboli*). While the formal ties of both thinkers to Augustine have been investigated, their joint ties both to Augustine and to each other have not been structurally explored. It is my contention that this research, when done properly, would throw much needed light on the history of Augustinianism in the early Middle Ages.

even increasingly so—²¹ the importance of Abelard's contribution lies in his conscious and insistent attempts to try and create a level playing field for the encounter of human motivation and divine guidance. Where after Augustine the balance may seem to have been lost, Abelard strives to establish a new equilibrium between, on the one hand, the need to explain and legitimate human actions and, on the other, the need to adhere to an overarching concept of justice, one which explicitly includes the notion of divine judgment. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Abelard's approach in his 'Theologies' concentrating on the predicative ability of language, is very similar to that of his *Ethics* which focuses on the various aspects of human choice and deliberation.²² How the freedom of human choice ultimately effects its predication of the divine is a point to which we will return.

As De Rijk explains, Abelard brings about an equilibrium between the human and the divine element in his moral theory by inserting a third element between the will (*voluntas*), which in the Augustinian school of his days was deemed the dominant factor in distinguishing between good and evil, and the action taken as a result of this will (*actio, exsecutio*). This third element is the so-called *consensus*, the human consent to carry out the act. According to De Rijk, for Abelard the defining moment is the transition from *consensus* to *actio*, and not, as is often thought, the transition from *voluntas* to *consensus*. While Abelard remains staunchly Augustinian in the sense that he attributes a central role to the faculty of the will,²³ his choice of playing off the will against consent is merely an auxiliary strategy to

²¹ On the impact of nominalism and what he calls 'the disintegration of the medieval synthesis', see Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity. An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven and London, 1994), 174–81.

²² In this respect I disagree with the recent study of M. Perkams, *Liebe als Zentralbegriff der Ethik nach Peter Abaelard* (Münster, 2001), 8–10, 300–40, who sees Abelard positioned at the crossroads between Augustinian tradition and modern subjective thought. While love is indeed a concept central to Christianity, in my view the symmetry problem indicated here features both more prominently and more urgently in Abelardian ethics than the concept of Christian love.

²³ See R. Blomme, *La doctrine du péché dans les écoles théologiques de la première moitié du XII^e siècle* (Louvain, 1958) for an analysis of the respective positions of the school of Laon, the followers of Abelard and the school of St. Victor. While there are definite similarities between the Augustinian position of Abelard and that of Hugh of St. Victor, a major difference is the nuances that Abelard adds to the position of the will. See Blomme, *La doctrine du péché*, 315: 'Abélard parlait en effet tantôt de *consensus*, tantôt d'*intentio*. Hugues considère purement et simplement les vocables

nuance the terms of the debate. The major difficulty for him is how to make the distinction between the consenting moment and the (un)ethical act itself transparent. To this end he introduces such famous examples as that of a slave who kills his master in self-defense, for he would certainly have been killed himself had he chosen not to do so. In either case, however, there is a choice. That Abelard's is not exactly a revolutionary mind in the field of ethics becomes clear from his famous dictum that the slave should have preferred to undergo this evil instead of inflicting it. It would have been better, in other words, had the slave chosen to let himself be killed instead of killing his master.²⁴

That *consensus* is a middle term for Abelard, as De Rijk aptly demonstrates, is true in more ways than one. Horizontally, it marks the transition between the individual's will, which generically encompasses desire as well as longing, and his or her specific actions. De Rijk is keen to point out how all Abelard's examples have a definite social character, thereby indicating to us that underneath, the stability of the social order is at risk.²⁵ In a move which transcends the framework of De Rijk's article, it seems legitimate to argue that *consensus* also plays a mediating role for Abelard on the vertical level. For is it not true that the thing to which one consents or not in the last resort is respect for divine law? One may even go so far as to state that divine law forms the explicit substrate of the social order, as the horizontal and the vertical level must ultimately merge for him. This is where I locate the real problems for Abelard's ethics. This, in other words, is where Abelard truly meets Augustine, not the authoritative icon of his contemporaries but the historical bishop who, while engaged in battle with the Pelagian heresy, faced very

consensus, voluntas ou *propositum* comme des synonymes.' On the same page Blomme notes also how Hugh considers the external act as having a psychological impact on human behavior, something which Abelard denies.

²⁴ See De Rijk, *Scherpzinnigheid*, 33–35, 'Meister und Opfer,' 136–37, 'Abelard and Moral Philosophy,' 8–10. On the example of the master and his servant, see *Ethica*, ed. and trans. Luscombe, 8: 8–12: '... that will is in no way to be derided as bad through which he, as you say, wanted to evade death, not to kill the lord. And yet although he was constrained by fear of death, he did do wrong in consenting to an unjust killing which he should have undergone rather than inflicted'.

²⁵ For this horizontal sense of justice Abelard, interestingly enough, uses the terms *ratio providentiae* and *dispensatio*. See *Ethica*, ed. Luscombe, 44: 11–12 and De Rijk, *Scherpzinnigheid*, 42, 'Abelard and Moral Philosophy,' 20.

similar problems. For what, so Abelard asks reluctantly, if the horizontal and the vertical do not converge, but are consigned instead forever to follow divergent paths?²⁶

To solve this problem, Abelard does not feel required to return to the inherited concepts of grace and free will, as he gradually comes to develop his own alternatives. Naturally, in light of his talent, these have a highly semantic character. Given that for a good part of his adult life Abelard was a Benedictine monk, it is remarkable—and only partly explicable by his scholastic training—that his efforts to employ an inclusive concept of justice embracing both the human and the divine are no longer anchored in the lifestyle of monastic penitence. This was the model favored by Anselm of Canterbury, whose comprehensive monastic approach allowed him to settle all problems of morality, at least *in nuce*, by rooting his theological explanation in the historical God-Man. From his *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm's arguments flow naturally and inseparably into both *De conceptu virginali* and *De originali peccato*, as they each strengthen the divine and human aspects of his overall approach to justice. They are carried further by the humility with which the monks, despite their proleptic eschatological role as redeemed humans, are still required to pray the Lord's prayer for the forgiveness of sins, including also their own.

While Abelard repeatedly calls on the Christ of the Gospel, as in his various 'Theologies', he does so mostly to invoke a divine blessing for his Trinitarian experiments. Apparently, he sees his own experiments neither as flowing forth naturally from the nature of the divine nor as a direct extension of the monastic office of praising God. Viewing theology as an emerging science, he can no longer afford to employ divine grace as a kind of fall-back position, with Christ's redemption serving as a shortcut to explain away difficult ethical problems. But can we infer from the fact that he does not do so that logic for Abelard has now absorbed all the qualities that we formerly associated with divine grace? To put it even more

²⁶ When explaining how God is the prover of the hearts and the reins (*probator cordis et renum*, cf. Jer. 20:12), Abelard hints at the divergence of human jurisprudence and true divine justice. See *Ethica*, ed. and trans. Luscombe, 40:15–19: 'Whence often we punish the innocent or absolve the culpable through error or, as we have said, through the compulsion of the law. God is said to be the prover and the judge of the heart and the reins (Jer. 20:12), that is of all the intentions which come from an affection of the soul or from a weakness or a pleasure of the flesh'.

sharply, is logic really to be considered the Abelardian equivalent of divine grace, as De Rijk seems to suggest?

This seems to me to be a solution that by all medieval standards pushes things too far. And as much as De Rijk is correct in seeing Abelard's *Ethica* as a theological work, in contrasting logic and grace he appears to slip in an anachronistic concept of theology. As a consequence, what he sees as the ultimate conflict between Abelard and Bernard—the fact that Bernard relies explicitly on grace, while Abelard plays up the importance of logic with such intensity that the art itself becomes identified as a gift of grace—needs in reality not to have been the source of any conflict at all. As we saw in the opening segment of the previous chapter, logic is a matter of talent for Abelard, and talent is a matter of grace, conferred as it is upon the individual who, by the very act of making use of it, engages in the praise of God. In that respect, Bernard need not disagree much with the principles of Abelard's *Ethics*. But where Abelard wants to use the art of logic to reach a definitive solution of ethical matters, going so far as to preempt God's judgment by immunizing humans against future wrongdoing, Bernard prefers to stay within the stable Augustinian framework of grace and free will and, so one may assume, of that of traditional predestination. Abelard, meanwhile, begins to use his logical insights to make irreversible progress in the field of ethics, which may be shown especially from his constructive analysis of *consensus*.

In doing so, however, Abelard also conjures up a new set of problems. For if it is true, as he indeed seems to hold, that the human system of distributing justice is by definition fallible, since only he who judges the *puritatem aequitatis*, i.e. God, can be trusted to scrutinize the hearts and minds of sinners, on what does he base his confidence that we can gain a reliable insight into the structure of divine providence? What is more, how does he think he can do so by pushing the bounds of what is, in the last resort, also a merely human art, namely, the art of logic? Here it appears that we have to try and connect the level playing field which Abelard wants to achieve in the realm of human ethics with what he wants to achieve in the realm of human logic in his 'Theologies', with a special focus on his *Theologia 'Scholarium'*, as in both cases he wants to overcome the asymmetry of human sin.

III *Divine Providence in Abelard*

In his *Theologia 'Scholarium'*, which is left to us in different redactions, we find Abelard again dealing with the persons of the Trinity, as he already did in the *Theologia 'Summi boni'* and the *Theologia christiana*. But as his discourse develops, Abelard's linguistic arguments—for, as usual, he prefers to move on the level of *vocabula*—seem to 'thicken,' as they become laden with soteriological overtones. As an example we have already pointed to the opening sequence of Book I where Abelard describes faith, love and the sacraments as the three things in which the sum of human salvation consists for him (*tria sunt in quibus humanae salutis summa consistit*).²⁷ As Abelard points out in the preface, his students understand matters much better if he applies his own talent (*nostrum ingenium*) to penetrate the reasons of sacred faith instead of emptying the wells of Philosophy's abyss.²⁸

Interestingly enough in view of his ethics, we also find him restating here the familiar theme that knowledge cannot be bad, not even the knowledge of evil, as one can only deem the use of it good or bad.²⁹ This is in full conformity with the soteriological impulse behind this work. One of the new accents Abelard adds to his reflections on this theme here is the idea that knowledge is unable to make one culpable. To underscore this point, he returns to the familiar aspect of foreknowledge. As he already states in *Theologia christiana* III.6, it appears as if the most useful aspect of having foreknowledge of evil is precisely that this knowledge enables one to avoid it:

For nobody has called any knowledge bad, not even that knowledge which is about evil, which cannot be lacking in a just person. Not so that he will accomplish evil, but to make provision against the evil he anticipates, which as Boethius says he cannot avoid unless it is known. Yet to deceive or to commit adultery is not to know evil, but to commit it, of which knowledge is a good thing but the act itself most evil; and nobody sins by knowing a sin but by committing it. If a certain knowledge would be evil, then it would be evil to know certain things. What is more, in that case God could not be absolved from evil, since

²⁷ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* I.1, ed. Buytaert and Mews, CCCM 13: 318. See also above chapter 4, p. 149 n. 34 and p. 160 n. 57.

²⁸ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'*, Prefacio 2, CCCM 13: 312: . . . uisum illis est ut multo facilius diuinæ paginae intelligentiam siue sacrae fidei rationes nostrum penetraret ingenium quam philosophicae abyssi puteos . . . exhausisset.

²⁹ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* II.29, CCCM 13: 421.

he knows all. For in him alone is the fullness of all disciplines of knowledge, since all knowledge is his gift. Knowledge is the comprehension of the truth of things that are, and he truly discerns all things for whom even the things *that are not* (Rom. 4:17) are at hand as if present.³⁰

Abelard's message is crystal clear: the knowledge of evil is not bad, but the doing of it is. After all, if knowledge itself were bad, not even God would be able to absolve us from malice. God's omnipotence follows on the heels of his omniscience, as he extends his acts of mercy and forgiveness to sinners whose evildoing he could not have failed to foresee. It is important to state that, in contrast to Boethius and William of Conches, Abelard seems to employ a different concept of knowledge here. On the whole, Abelard's concept of knowledge or *scientia* concerns only the comprehension of the truth of the things that are. It is as if the quality of being adds a kind of solidity (cf. *res*) that can easily fall by the wayside given Abelard's usual barrage of words. In order for knowledge to be truly complete, however, one must be able to discern any and all things, including those that are not. In the end only God can claim to have such fullness of knowledge, since to him even the things that are not are as if present (*quasi presentia*), and thus only he is able to have complete discernment.

Thus, it seems human knowledge is inevitably flawed. Human beings simply cannot stretch their imaginations so as to have all things present in their mind (*quasi presentia*) in the same way God can. Given this structural lack of discernment on humanity's part, the line between being able to commit evil in virtue of having knowledge of it—Abelard similarly holds that the power to do evil is not thereby itself evil—and factual transgression for humans is very thin. Ironically, as Abelard's censoring of his own acts in the *Historia* proves only too well, it is one that was rather easy to cross.

Abelard's main concern in his *Ethics* is to correct this flaw by making the dynamics that go into the process of human consent transparent. He appears content with this approach even though he knows that the human justice system, including the ecclesiastical courts, will never be flawless. But just as God knows and, in the end, will dispense true justice, so Abelard is likewise convinced that human beings are truly able to know in their hearts whether they are guilty or

³⁰ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* II.29, CCCM 13: 421.

innocent. This is brought out by the subtitle of his *Ethics*, which points to the importance of self-knowledge: *Scito teipsum*. To put this title in context, we can refer back to the long tradition of introspection that has come down from antiquity.³¹ Furthermore, we have considered above the sense in which the twelfth century was also the era of interiorizing,³² which gives Abelard's notion of self-knowledge an added autobiographical twist. Still, it remains to be determined whether his reference to self-knowledge in his ethics extends also to the specific interiorization of sin and guilt which is such a staple of anti-Pelagian Augustinianism. I shall come back to this at the end of this chapter when we will draw some conclusions.

For now let us concentrate first on what clues Abelard's reflections on providence may give us. The following two points are of specific interest. First, we want to see whether Abelard can guarantee that a convergence of horizontal and vertical justice will indeed be found, or forged for that matter, both in the created and the social order, and if so how. Second, we want to see if and how establishing a level playing field in the realm of ethics connects with his project of doing the same in talking about God. To start with the first point, even if it is true that Abelard does not invoke a concept of justice that is anchored in the concept of the God-Man, as with Anselm of Canterbury, it is nevertheless true that he has grave christological concerns. As these center around the problem of human redemption, it should not surprise us to find the notion of providence revealing close ties with the second person of the Trinity. In *Theologia christiana* I.20, with reference to a quotation about the prologue to St. John's Gospel from Gregory the Great, Abelard thus can state:

For he calls Word a concept of the mind and a kind of locution of the understanding, which is made in the mind, in whose likeness he is called the only born Son of God and the Word is like some kind of intellectual and perpetual way of speech, in whose providence the operation and ordination of all things is arranged from the beginning.³³

³¹ See P. Courcelle, *Connais-toi toi-même: de Socrate à Saint Bernard* (Paris, 1974–75) for an expansive treatment of this topic in the history of philosophical and theological thought.

³² See C. Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200* (1972; Toronto, 1987), 64–95.

³³ See *Theologia christiana* I.20, ed. Buytaert, CCCM 12: 79–80.

What is clear from this passage, and is restated by Abelard on many other occasions, is that providence is a property of the Divine Word, as in it the working of all (created) things has been pre-established. Providence has the connotation of care here, as elsewhere Abelard combines it with *tutela*.³⁴ It carries the further sense of stability, as Abelard calls it a permanent word, contrasting this divine Word with the audible and transitory words of human beings.³⁵ Here we sense his Neoplatonic background, as he quotes from Augustine's *De civitate Dei* XVI, where it is said that divine speech is God's very way of ordering (*divina locutio est ipsa Dei dispositio*).³⁶ As we saw before, the Platonic tradition had reached Abelard also through different channels, namely through Cicero and Macrobius. In the intellectual tradition of these authors Abelard relates Divine Speech more to the Holy Spirit, whose function he equates with that of the World Soul, calling it 'the life of the universe'. To the Spirit we can likewise attribute both the role of providence and the fullness of divine science.³⁷

It is true that Abelard's position betrays an imbalance here, as he can associate providence both with the Son and the Spirit. This imbalance derives in part from his desire not to occupy a strict Augustinian position, as he seems interested in trying to salvage the role of human free will in the face of divine governance. In light of his interest in establishing the parameters of human responsibility he finds the Aristotelian argument convincing (cf. *rectae rationes*)³⁸ that in case of the strictest notion of divine providence, there would be no point in counseling or negotiating (*consiliari aut negotiari*). As these are prime human activities involving deliberation, they bring in doubt

³⁴ See *Theologia christiana* II.85, CCCM 12: 169: *Hoc quoque addidit (scil. Plato) nos esse in dominio Dei cuius tutela et providentia gubernamur.*

³⁵ See *Theologia christiana* I.53, CCCM 12: 93. See also above chapter 4, p. 164 n. 65.

³⁶ This is the Augustine text as Abelard quoted it in the first and second redaction of the *Theologia christiana*. He amended it in the third to match *De civitate Dei* 16.6 more precisely.

³⁷ See *Theologia christiana* I.95, CCCM 12: 111: (Speaking about Plato again, having mentioned a.o. Cicero, Pythagoras, Vergil and Macrobius). See also L. Moonan, 'Abelard's Use of the *Timaeus*,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 56 (1989): 56–72 about Abelard's use of the World Soul as an *involutum* or Enfolding Image for the temporal mission of the Holy Spirit. See also above ch. 4, p. 144 n. 28.

³⁸ See *Theologia christiana* III.5, CCCM 12: 196, on the rejection of Stoic fate and the defense of free will.

as a structural component on the level of human action.³⁹ Going from Abelard's 'Theologies' to his *Ethics*, one way of approaching Abelard's definition of consent (*consensus*) is precisely to see it as an attempt to fence off what little maneuvering space humans have in their lives to engage at all in counseling and negotiating. Given the ecclesiastical reforms in the twelfth century and the church's ever-growing and more invasive bureaucracy, this achievement was no unimportant matter.⁴⁰

"He discerns all things truly, for whom even the things that are not are at hand as if present" (*Is veraciter cuncta discernit cui ea quoque quae non sunt quasi presentia assistunt*). It is clear that Abelard will never be able to solve the matters of faith and theology on the level of *vocabula*, as these are inevitably human and hence flawed. However much he will continue striving to do so, as a true dialectician he is remarkably ready—more so than most of his peers or even than his own reputation suggests—to admit to the limitations of this his favorite art. Obviously, this is not to suggest that henceforth he will judge his opponents lightly, for he likes to crush an incompetent argument when he sees one. But the problems of morality, sin, guilt, evil, fate, in short, of all the issues on the spectrum of human salvation, are simply too substantial, too 'real' (cf. *res*) in other words, to be solved by semantics alone. Thus Abelard's 'rolled-up' language never comes to a state of rest, in the same way as it is impossible that his restless *ingenium* ever fails to tire. On the other hand, having predicated the problem of human redemption on the incontrovertible fact of Christ's saving work, he is no longer able simply to fall back on a kind of theological sophistry, even though his opponents will keep scapegoating him as a sophist. This means that in reading Abelard we will continue to be confronted with these so-called intellectual 'knots', since he will never be able to reconcile form and content in a perfect manner.

And yet there is a way in which he seems more capable than before of juxtaposing the different questions in such a way that the familiar tapestry reveals a new pattern. Thus, when we find him

³⁹ See *Theologia christiana* III.5, CCCM 12: 196 with reference to Aristotle, *Perihermenias* 9, 18b in Boethius' translation.

⁴⁰ At the same time it may offer us a better explanation of his *Ethics* than a narrowly biographical reading by which Abelard is put in a position of conflict with the Church's penitential code.

stating here again, as he did in his earlier 'Theologies', that there should be a connection between the words that are used and the things they describe, it appears this time he is more ready to leave room for the possibility, perhaps even the necessity, of their discrepancy. Just as God was able to perform miracles, such as healing the blind or the virgin birth, even if it meant that he had to break the rules of nature, so there should be adequate language to convey God's mercy, even if it meant that the rules of ordinary language had to be shattered.

See how according to this testimony (Col. 2:8) and, as we remembered above, the testimony of Job (23:13), we are forced to profess him alone properly to be about whom nothing at all is set according to that discipline of the secular doctors which distributes the natures of all things, as is said, among ten predicates. Pay heed, brothers and verbose friends, how much divine and human traditions disagree, spiritual and natural philosophers, disciplines of sacred and secular scriptures, and do not accuse as rash judges, when faith puts forth such words whose understanding is unknown to your disciplines.⁴¹

At first sight it seems as if with this passage, lifted from his earlier 'Theologies', Abelard only adds to the already existing tension between the level of human predication and that of divine reality. But such a verdict would be to overlook the fact that he had previously pointed out a solution. For had he not described God's knowledge as a kind of universal discretion, dealing not only with the things that are, of which knowledge is possible for humans as well, but also with the things that are not 'as if they are present' (*quasi presentia*)? Could we not count future contingents, evil occurrences and other mishaps, miracles against nature, all of them items which Abelard will go on to discuss next, among the things which, strictly speaking, are not but which are nonetheless *quasi presentia* to God? If so, what Abelard does here is to try and set the terms for a new kind of a metaphorical logic, a veritable 'theo-logic' one might call it. If we try to describe Abelard's procedure along these lines, he appears to be engaged in creating a level of discourse on which God and humanity can have a meaningful exchange, their essential differences notwithstanding, as the one is creator and the other created. What is even more important, however, is that through this linguistic juxtaposi-

⁴¹ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* II.89, CCCM 13: 451.

tion Abelard is able to find what is in effect a new tone of voice, one which enables him at least in part to 'unpack' problems instead of presenting them as just 'rolled up,' as he can analyze the problem of divine goodness and human evil as part of the same sequence. Thus he is dealing with the problem of divine will from the angle of divine causality and of human morality at the same time.

Problems remain, however. For if human beings are granted some room to maneuver before they get down to consent (*consensus*), so should God. The noted imbalance in Abelard's sense of providence cannot fail to affect also the role of the divine, at least potentially. It is at this point that the notion of grace comes in for Abelard. In *Theologia christiana* V.26, a position which he repeats in *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.24, Abelard states that one can speak about God's will (*uelle*) in two ways:

In two ways can it be said that God wants. One way is according to the arrangement of his providence, according to which he disposes something by himself and deliberates and decides in his providence so as to fulfill it afterwards. The second is according to the exhortation or approbation of his advice by which he admonishes everybody to this thing, for which he is ready to reward them through grace. . . . So he counsels every man about his salvation and exhorts him to it, although few obey.⁴²

The first sense in which he takes the divine will, equating it with providence, is remarkably similar to the interpretation of consent which he works out in his *Ethics*: God deliberates and then consents, after which he executes his plan. The second notion is much weaker, as all we have here is merely a kind of divine admonition to lead the good life. Apparently, counseling and negotiating is not just for human beings. In Abelard's theological view, God is in the business of constantly advising and exhorting human beings to do his will, after which he then is ready or prepared (*paratus*) to reward them through his grace. God's readiness to reward human beings through his grace might proleptically sway them to do his will. It ultimately seems as if the human and the divine *uelle* have blended here to such an extent that they have been transformed into different perspectives, integrated firmly in the oneness of the divine substance.

⁴² See *Theologia christiana* V.26–28, CCCM 12: 357–58 and *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.24–26, CCCM 13: 510–11.

The underlying idea that holds Abelard's 'theo-logic' together seems to be that, to the extent that the human perspective is deficient because not all humans are obedient, the goodness of the divine steps in to maintain the integrity of the divine plan. Depending on how one interprets the little phrase *per gratiam suam*, Abelard seems to come awfully close to the Pelagian heresy here, for grace is almost seen here as a reward for human merit. And yet, as his works frequently show, Abelard clearly wants to stay far from that. Moreover, as his remark that only few are called shows, he transfers the problem from one in theo-logic to one in morality. But how does this switch work?

IV *Providence: When Logic Meets Morality*

To start with his logical position first, we can state the following. Abelard's hard-fought linguistic solution of being able to see the human and the divine as different perspectives on the same subject-matter has the effect of 'thickening' his discourse sufficiently to deal with human salvation as a serious intellectual problem. And yet, this solution by its very nature contains also the seeds of its own demise. Undermining the efficacy of his new experimental discourse is the fact that the rules of ordinary logic can at any time be overthrown, as it is after all the divine will which rules supreme. By being willing to upset his new-found security by resorting explicitly to the gift of God's mercy, Abelard injects a new anxiety into his discussion of divine providence. This new anxiety comes out particularly at the end of *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III. Here he discusses the identity of the phrases 'God saves him' and 'he is saved by God,' as he states in ch. 39: *Quippe quid aliud est eum saluari a deo, quam deum saluare eum?* Logically speaking they are indeed identical, for when the former is possible, it is clear that the latter must be also. But if problems of salvation could be settled by making them the subject of a grammatical debate, even if we were to use a much-improved tool in the shape of a 'thickened' theo-logic, such a debate would proceed at a high price, *viz.* the price of not doing justice to the benevolence and mercy of the divine. As he tries to press on in his attempt to make clear what distinguishes the phrase *eum saluari a deo* and *deum saluare eum* in the *Theologia 'Scholarium'*, this paradox has the effect of permanently destabilizing Abelard's reflections on salvation.

How important establishing a distinction between *eum saluari a deo* and *deum saluare eum*, however slight, is to Abelard's larger theological framework, the soteriological overtones of which we have already pointed out, becomes clear in the analysis that follows. Abelard wants to go explicitly against the tradition that God can only do what he does, as he deems Anselm's idea of *necessitas sequens* too restrictive.⁴³ Thus his position implies that God is always capable of doing still *more*, which includes the possibility of his doing some things which he nevertheless omits to do. This means concretely that it is possible for God not to save some people whom he would yet have been capable of saving. The question then naturally arises whether in these cases God's omnipotence stands in the way of his love. What's more, the logical identity of 'it is possible for somebody to be saved by God' and 'it is possible for God to save him' is seriously at risk of being overthrown, thereby undermining not just the efficacy of human speech but destroying whatever fragile balance of Abelard's newly found theological language.

But is this really what is happening? Abelard seems to move indeed in this direction, as he adduces many biblical examples where God does not intervene or, at least in our opinion, fails to wield his power in order to save everybody. In the course of his argument he objects to a facile identification of the above two statements, as we should understand them in a more nuanced fashion. His idea is that in the first phrase the possibility refers to human mutability, to the extent that someone can either be saved or be doomed, whereas in the phrase *deum posse illum saluare qui minime saluandus est* the modal quality (*possibilitas*) applies solely to the divine nature, inasmuch as it would not detract from God's dignity to save such a person.⁴⁴ His judgment is apodeictic: that suggestion alone is totally out of the question (*quod omnino falsum est*). It is clear that, when necessary, Abelard is ready to sacrifice grammatical identity to do justice to the glory of the divine. In some cases it may just not be possible for God to save someone. To illustrate this he introduces the example of an audible word. The fact that a word is audible does not

⁴³ See Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo* II.17, ed. F.S. Schmitt, vol. 2, 125: *Est namque necessitas praecedens, quae causa est ut sit res; et est necessitas sequens, quam res facit* ('For there is an antecedent necessity which is the cause of a thing's existence; and there is a consequent necessity which the thing brings about').

⁴⁴ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III 49, CCCM 13: 521.

imply that when a word is uttered it is actually heard. An example is the case when one addresses a company of deaf people, as they simply lack the capacity to hear.⁴⁵

An interesting and far more revealing example of how Abelard stretches the concept of grammatical identity to introduce a certain latitude of meaning is contained in the example which follows next. Abelard compares the phrase 'it is just that the judge punishes him' (*iustum sit iudicem punire istum*) with the phrase 'it is just that he be punished by a judge' (*iustum etiam sit istum puniri a iudice*). While the first statement refers to the regular practice of law, the second concentrates on the culpability of the defendant. Accordingly, the meaning of the word 'just' (*iustum*) varies considerably, indicating the semantic polyvalence of the term. This can be illustrated by the case in which it may yet be just for a judge to convict an innocent person on account of false testimony, whereas it is obviously unjust for the person to be convicted.⁴⁶ Returning to the matter of human salvation at hand, Abelard's ultimate 'judgement' is that a similar polyvalence contaminates the term 'possible' in the examples given above, thereby thwarting the kind of logical analysis undertaken by philosophers. For while it may be possible that someone be saved, it may be impossible for God to save this or that person. Thus Abelard's desire not to curtail divine freedom has the ironic effect of both restraining the arbitrary use of divine omnipotence and heightening human anxiety, including—as always—his own.

While the above reflections may well have the opposite effect of what I intended, inasmuch as they illustrate how Abelard is inherently unable to solve the paradox of divine freedom and human culpability, his constant attempts at fine-tuning his position as to what this paradox entails nevertheless add a cogency and moral precision to his language rarely encountered before the twelfth century. More concretely, it brings the theological and ethical responses to standard questions as those of divine omnipotence and divine providence together. While it is Abelard's logical prowess that has mostly determined his reputation, even his contribution in that field cannot be truly understood if we strip it of its moral and existential overtones, however suppressed they may appear.

⁴⁵ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.50, CCCM 13: 521–22.

⁴⁶ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.52, CCCM 13: 522.

One way to explain what moral goals Abelard is after is to see the above distinction between the two kinds of divine will as a kind of acknowledgment that the horizontal and vertical concepts of justice may indeed follow diverging paths, without the need to sacrifice completely his trust in divine providence. Just as the divine order precedes and underlies the social one in his *Ethics*, so here a clear awareness of God's general providence underlies the divine will to offer people salvation at least as an option. But does Abelard truly consider this option viable? Far from presenting a kind of Pelagian picture,⁴⁷ as if he is primarily interested in coming out from under a strict sense of divine providence to plead for a merit-based ethics, the converse seems altogether more plausible, as he may want to defend divine providence over and against the reality of human failure, the awareness of which can only breed despair. It is clear on the whole that Abelard has little trust in human free will, however much he is willing to defend it, just as he is aware of the limitations of human speech, striving for its accuracy nonetheless. This would imply that he is not at all ready to give up on the guidance of divine providence. If so, there are sufficient grounds to see the distinction between God's two wills as Abelard's precaution against despair rather than as betraying any kind of advocacy of a merit-based ethics.⁴⁸

That Abelard is interested indeed in offering a moral precaution against despair becomes clear from his example in *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.102 about the case of a doomed man (*dampnandus*).⁴⁹ In Abelard's view God's providence here equals his foreknowledge, which means

⁴⁷ This is the core of William of St. Thierry's caricatural accusations of Abelard. See on this Aage Rydstrom-Poulsen, *The Gracious God. Gratia in Augustine and the Twelfth Century* (Copenhagen, 2002), 157–159.

⁴⁸ Abelard's preference for a merit-based ethics should be denied on other grounds as well, namely as a result of his intentional position, which holds that deeds in themselves are indifferent. See e.g. *Ethica*, ed. Luscombe, 22: *Nichil ergo ad augmentum peccati pertinet qualiscumque operum executio* ('The doing of deeds has no bearing upon an increase of sin'). In a recent article, István Bejczy faults Abelard for not adhering to his own principles and surreptitiously inserting a merit-based ethics. See I. Bejczy, 'Deeds Without Value: Exploring a Weak Spot in Abelard's Ethics,' *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévale* 70 (2003): 1–21.

⁴⁹ For the entire passage, see *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.102, CCCM 13: 541–42. See esp. 542: *Verbi gratia, prouidit ab eterno, id est presciuit, hunc qui dampnandus est facere per que dampnetur* ('For example, he saw from eternity, that is he foresaw, that he who is doomed does the things on account of which he is doomed').

concretely that God sees the doomed man do those things that will get him doomed from eternity. What Abelard tries to avoid here in his elucidation of providence is to interpret such instances of divine foreknowledge as cases of causal determinism. This he would consider a fatal flaw, not because such an interpretation thwarts the divine freedom of will, as will be the later Scotist position, but because it rules out the possibility of human self-improvement. Against Pelagius' attempt to have human merit count towards salvation, Abelard shows an essential fear not that God's omnipotence and providence will rule out luck and coincidence—that they do not, as he makes clear based on philosophical arguments—but that the essential possibility for ethical self-improvement will be closed off.⁵⁰

That this is indeed Abelard's position is brought out even more clearly from an example he uses a little further on in *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.107. Here he discusses the meaning of predestination, that charged Augustinian term suggesting such a firm divine control of history, much more so than mere providence, that it potentially rules out all human free will. For Abelard predestination is different from providence because it is directly tied to salvation. Predestination goes to the heart of the convergence of horizontal and vertical justice, therefore, in a way that providence does not. His examples often have a soteriological purpose, in that he wants to leave open the possibility of human salvation, even when simultaneously he is engaged in trying to salvage God's free will. As a result Abelard comes to argue that, while it is indeed necessary for God to save every one predestined, it is not thereby necessary that God save this or that man. As he states:

For it does not follow that if we accept that it is necessary that every predestined one be saved, we are forced to concede that we should say about all individual predestined persons that it is necessary that this one or that one be saved. For if we take away the designation 'predestined persons' which implies necessity because of the connotation added, we do not interpret the phrase 'that it is necessary that this or that person be saved' in this way. From this it follows that we accept that it is necessary that he who is predestined be saved in a certain

⁵⁰ While Abelard's *Ethics* is mostly analyzed on the point of how he defines human sin and guilt, it should not be forgotten that the consequence of his intentional ethics is that there arises more room for moral self-improvement. In this sense, Abelard's position foreshadows the virtue ethics of Thomas Aquinas and other scholastic thinkers.

sense, namely, that it is necessary that he who is such that he is predestined, be saved.⁵¹

... *Eum qui talis est, cum sit predestinatus, saluari necesse est.* ... As is clear from the above passage, Abelard renders the meaning of the phrase 'that it is necessary that every predestined one be saved' as 'that it is necessary that he who is such that he is predestined, be saved'. This is indeed a solution on the level of logic, as Abelard seems able to uphold the concept of necessity which does not solidify into a rigid causal determinism. But soteriologically he opens up an abyss, so it appears, as the pattern of divine protection threatens to flatten out into simultaneous instances of divine oversight.

This becomes clear from Abelard's subsequent examples in the *Theologia 'Scholarium'*. At one point he even goes so far as to say that there is not more of a connection between God's ability to foresee events and their actual unfolding than between the ability of humans to witness events and the events witnessed. Thus we are equally justified in stating: I see that this person writes or that that person commits adultery as, alternatively, we are in stating that God foresees that this person writes or that that person commits adultery. When I see someone write or commit adultery, or when God does so through foreknowledge, in both cases it is imperative that the person observed actually finds himself in the process of writing or committing adultery at that very moment. But even when we admit that a weaker connection exists between the knowledge of an occurrence and the occurrence itself, as it is no longer of a causal but only a temporal nature, even for God, this does not yet increase this or that person's chances for salvation, or anyone's for that matter. In other words, the end of causal determinism does not thereby usher in a new era of moral redemption, as Abelard seems to have pretended and at any rate may have hoped.

As the ill-fated consequence of human free will and a conditioning aspect of what it means to be human for Abelard, sin remains with us during the course of our lives. As is made clear by the context of his argument, the modal term 'necessary' used here does not imply that actions like adultery cannot be stopped or avoided. It simply means that human beings can never avoid responsibility for such actions, irrespective of God's mercy. This is true, so one could

⁵¹ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.107, CCCM 13: 544.

infer from the example of the *dampnandus*, both in the case of divine providence as in the unforeseen case of divine forgiveness. As Abelard stipulates:

... every sin is more voluntary than necessary and proceeds from free will, not because of any collusion of nature or from a compulsion of divine providence.⁵²

... *Eum qui talis est, cum sit predestinatus, saluari necesse est . . . omne peccatum magis uoluntarium quam necessarium sit . . .* The problem of logic may be solved, and Abelard's mission in his 'Theologies' appears to have been successfully completed, but it has only brought him to address what is both a larger and a deeper moral problem, namely how to gain insight in what seems in the end to be a matter of divine discretion. For how do you know whether you are predestined, or how do you know whether in the end your sins qualify more as necessary than as voluntary perhaps, so that to that extent you can feel absolved from guilt? For all the success of Abelard's attempts in his *Ethics* to try and make human consent the defining ethical moment, so as to put the blame where the guilt is, he is clearly aware that underneath all this there lurks a deeper problem to which, for lack of a better word, we may still refer as the problem of grace, seen as a moral rather than a theological problem. To this we shall now turn.

V *Grace and the Self in Abelard*

... *Eum qui talis est, cum sit predestinatus, saluari necesse est.* If anyone in the twelfth century had reason to worry about being saved, it was Peter Abelard. Overflowing with talent, well-positioned to have a magnificent career, he broke the rules of the clerical calling and made a disgrace of himself. Little wonder then that for him getting access to grace was of the utmost importance. This may explain his fascination with questions pertaining to the problem of salvation, which seem indeed to have always been in the front of his mind, as we find them quite literally strewn throughout his theological works. As the analysis in this and the previous chapter has shown,

⁵² See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.107, CCCM 13: 544.

however, for all Abelard's fascination with debate and discussion, the art of logic may have been a great help to him in fine-tuning the definition of the problem, including the problem of morality, but it could not offer a definitive solution, insofar as he was well aware that salvation was not to be achieved through logical advances alone. Nor through theological ones alone, for that matter.⁵³ At the end of the day, therefore, it appears Abelard finds himself quite literally left to his own devices.

This may in itself be a very valuable conclusion. For if this is really true, as I indeed have come to believe, then Abelard's remarkable interest in self-knowledge and introspection, much as it reflects the discovery of the individual as an important aspect of twelfth-century literary production, is at the same time and, perhaps more deeply so, an attempt to find out whether he was . . . *talis, cum sit predestinatus*, whether he himself belonged to the number of the predestined. On a more structural level, then, what Abelard teaches us is that the instrument of self-knowledge may be more suited to make ethical than psychological progress, with ethics being seen as the art best suited to anticipate eschatological justice. The relevance of his introspective works would thus go beyond the help they afford in uncovering the details of his biography, even if they never quite lead us into the labyrinthine halls of the inner self, which Augustine's *Confessions* have done so memorably. More concretely, their function may be to help him complete what we have called the journey back to paradise, revealing a moral rather than an autobiographical or even an exemplary soteriological intent. But if so, how is it that they serve progress in ethical thinking? Here the bringing in of the Pelagian problem is relevant indeed. For by mapping out how the self responds to tragedy, not just in his *Historia calamitatum* but also in his various *planctus*, what Abelard seems to be doing is in fact designing a counter-morality,⁵⁴ one in which the perspective of tragic loss retrospectively opens up new possibilities for human agency, leaving the dilemma of grace *versus* free will behind rather than trying to solve it.

⁵³ Still, it remains true that salvation is the point of doing theology for Abelard. See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* I.1, above n. 27.

⁵⁴ Martha Nussbaum, who holds that in order to understand Greek ethics, one should not only peruse the volumes of Greek philosophy but also mine the riches of literature, especially Greek tragedy, has influenced my approach in the final section of this chapter. See M.C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness. Luck and Ethics in Greek tragedy and Philosophy* (1986; rev. ed., Cambridge, 2001), 1–21.

As I have tried to show in the above analysis, it is clear that Abelard in his (theo)logical works wants to stay firmly within the bounds of Christian thought. Yet we should seriously ask whether the morality found in his more creative writing involving self-knowledge and/or introspection is in fact not meant to be an alternative to, rather than a correction or precision of, the traditional Christian dichotomy of grace *versus* free will. And if so, we should go further and evaluate the implications of his alternative. What to think, for example, of the famous *planctus* about Dinah and Sichem (Gen. 34)? In it we find him retelling the story, in lyrical form, of Dinah being raped by Sichem. In order not to bring dishonor to her family, Sichem decides to marry her and he and the male members of his family get circumcised. But Dinah's brothers Simeon and Levi, Jacob's sons, decide to kill the house of Sichem nonetheless, since they allegedly could not accept their sister being treated as a whore. In Dinah's lament, however, far from dwelling on the rape as the conspicuous cause of a series of lamentable events, Abelard resurrects rather than recreates what was fatally destroyed, the budding relationship between Dinah and Sichem. Moreover, by eulogizing it in his poem he sanctions it as a possible and positive choice, one seen as all the more vital because it never was to be.⁵⁵

Obviously this is a rather radical reinterpretation of Abelard's ethical project, the contours of which would need to be much more firmly drawn.⁵⁶ But if true, it could also be of enormous help in solving some problems of twelfth-century mentality which have puzzled generations of scholars, one of them being the question of whether the renaissance of that age was informed chiefly by Christian or by secular motifs. As an answer to De Rijk's idea that Abelard considered logic the gift of grace, and an attempt to refine the Pelagian problem beyond its Augustinian parameters of sin and guilt as indicative of the human condition,⁵⁷ it may well be Abelard's specific legacy to have made an earnest beginning with the design

⁵⁵ For the text of this *planctus*, see W. Meyer, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur mittel-lateinischen Rythmik* (1905; Hildesheim and New York, 1970), 366–67.

⁵⁶ See J. Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge, 1997), 213–331. In his segment on 'Ethics in Practice' (316–323) Marenbon makes insightful comments along the line of inquiry which I have set out here about Abelard's homilies and his *planctus*, yet he does not explore the structural ties to Abelard's formal ethical theory.

⁵⁷ If my theory holds water, it would seem to undermine De Rijk's idea that Abelard is refining the Augustinian position after all. Despite his Augustinian influence,

of a new morality, one suited more adequately to a post-monastic, urban, individualized and intellectual environment, in short, the environment of the schools rather than the cloister.⁵⁸ A distinguishing characteristic of his morality seems to be that grace is seen as that space afforded by the divine to the human order in which the self does not merely consent to goodness, but can actively bring it about through a dialogical, rather than dialectical, interplay of literary creation and moral re-creation.⁵⁹ Abelard's logic of predestination, then, may in the end have been more about logic than about predestination. After all, the crucial motive for him was not to uphold the necessity that God save this or that person, but to make clear that the very concept of salvation must inevitably give rise to its own necessity. This does not make the problems he faces any easier. But it does allow him to fence them off and bring them to bear on his own human condition.

VI Conclusion

It is clear that Peter Abelard wrestles enormously with the problem of human sin. Unlike Augustine and Anselm this does not bring him to reflect much on the problem of original sin and moral imperfection, although all that is definitely part of the intellectual tradition he inherited.⁶⁰ As we have just seen, ethical problems are given a

he may just not be, interested as he is in designing an individualized and post-monastic morality which is all his own.

⁵⁸ See A. Rydstrom-Paulsen, *The Gracious God*, 193: 'Abelard represents a breakthrough of a theology which looks beyond the walls of the church or the monastery. . . . His world is bigger and he wants to give logical, 'human and philosophical', reasons for his faith as also his students required.' I argue here that this is even more the case for his ethics.

⁵⁹ According to Peter von Moos, once we move beyond the ugly details of the authenticity-debate, this may well be considered the point or *intentio operis* of the correspondence between Abelard and Heloise. See P. von Moos, 'Abaelard, Heloise und Ihr Paraklet: Ein Kloster nach Mass. Zugleich eine Streitschrift gegen die ewige Wiederkehr hermeneutischer Naivität,' in: G. Melville, M. Schürer (eds), *Das Eigene und das Ganze. Zum individuellen im Mittelalterlichen Religiosentum* (Münster, 2002), 563–619.

⁶⁰ And a tradition which he did not hesitate to change, as his well-known distinction between Adam's original and individual guilt and the punishment of Adam's sin in which all of humanity shares makes clear. See on this A. Rydstrom-Paulsen, *The Gracious God*, 156–198, esp. 173–76. Yet to my mind, analyzing the logistics of Abelard's refinement of earlier positions with ever greater precision—also on the point of predestination and the rights of the devil—fails to reveal the fullness and fundamental newness of some of his arguments.

new and special focus in Abelard's analysis. But the problems he has with human sin center first and foremost on the problem of how to make adequate use of human language. It is interesting that in this regard Abelard stands apart from the (Neo)Platonic tradition, to which in other respects he is much indebted. But in the end the influence of Boethius is more dominant than that of either Augustine or Anselm, for whom language echoed ultimately the created order of things. For them the problem was how best to restore the original language of paradise, in which God was able to converse freely with Adam, given that human practice is fraught with the normal fate of people in exile.⁶¹ While they consider the attainment of this goal ultimately outside of human reach, it is nevertheless true that they consider the apparatus of human language, the words themselves, as suitable instruments. In their innate meanings something of the purity of the pristine order of God and humanity is retained. While in different ways something similar may have been true for Thierry of Chartres and William of Conches as regards cosmic design, in Abelard we face a changed situation. Representing no longer a legacy from paradise, human language is before all a matter of human agreement and convention. While this view accords with general Boethian practice, the position of language in Abelard is even more unsettling than one might expect. For it appears that when human beings turn agreement into disagreement, there is no fixed order of creation, not even a fallen one, on which to found one's truth. It is on the point of the self, then, rather than that of nature, that we see the paradise project collapse. As a result, twelfth-century discourse becomes more and more interested in exploring the new field of semantics rather than in the matter of trying to tie up loose ends. Despite his constant attempts, this is clear in the case of Abelard also.

For while Abelard is essentially a melancholy writer, he proves to be a very hands-on and pragmatic thinker. This means that his reasoning does not easily lapse into pessimism. His efforts at honing and fine-tuning the precision of human language show him a tireless and relentless logician. As he develops as a theologian as well as a philosopher, his interest expands to do justice to problems of

⁶¹ What becomes hauntingly clear from the novel by W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants* (London, 2002) is that exile can set one almost imperceptibly on the road to extinction, as his survivors are ultimately not able to cope with life's destiny and are led

moral sufficiency and human salvation as well. The boundary between logic and ethics, for example, thus becomes extremely thin, as in the discussion of whether the possibility for somebody to be saved is identical with God's power to save someone. If we step back from Abelard's immediate discussion in the 'Theologies' and compare his approach to divine providence with those of later theologians like John Calvin, we do indeed find the greatest disagreement precisely on the point of the human self. While Abelard shares with Calvin the firm belief in the freedom of God to render his own verdict, he does and will not share Calvin's opinion that this awful mystery be embraced as an anchor to which one should cling rather than trying to analyze it.

What binds the twelfth-century authors who, like Abelard, are thinking among the ruins of early medieval theology, its comprehensive and homogeneous world view shattered due to an overload of new impressions, information and all around development, is that they will henceforth shift their emphasis from the restoration of paradise to the resurrection of man, as foreshadowed in Alan of Lille's creation of a *novus homo*. While the ideal of a new man is best brought out by Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille, to whom we will next turn, Abelard crosses the threshold of the old and the new not as a stylish literary challenge but before all as a moral imperative. The *felix culpa* of the fall, which instituted humanity's innate desire for knowledge, becomes in Abelard a kind of *amor fati*, a stubborn, at times near-desperate hope that God will in the end liberate human language from the frailty of grammar and logic, bestowing it with a luminous transparency that solves all problems, whether they be ethical, philosophical, logical or theological.

In accordance with twelfth-century piety, a piety which one would not easily suspect Abelard of sharing, his deep sense of *amor fati* leads him in the end even to a faithful surrender to God's will. One may think here of the passage at the end of the *Historia calamitatum*, where he recommends that one puts God's will before one's own, as he ends this letter with the phrase from the Lord's prayer: Thy will be done.⁶² Whereas this passage is a text of a personal nature, this

to commit suicide. The subtle connections between the exile from paradise, the ambiguity of language and the tragedy of suicide will be explored in the next chapter.

⁶² See *Historia calamitatum*, ed. Monfrin, 1603–1609; trans. Radice, 106: 'Here he, scil. the author of Proverbs, shows that those who are angered by some personal

reliance on God's will is likewise encountered in a more objectifying statement found in *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.48: 'God's will, who shall resist it?'⁶³

To us it may seem odd that a logical mind like Abelard's would stoop to such a leap of faith. But perhaps we should turn this around and conclude that new games like speculative grammar and other experiments in medieval logic could ultimately only be played because they somehow were still part of a larger picture, the picture of remembering paradise. It fell specifically to Peter Abelard, so it seems, that when the contours of paradise began to fade, the parameters be drawn up for a new language, one which accepted its flaws as 'given' but not thereby 'definitive', as the hope for divine help in achieving humanity's moral and intellectual improvement never left him, but increasingly inspired him to the point of complete resignation. Somewhere in this space between 'given' and 'definitive' Abelard seems to have situated his own project. That it would soon be interpreted as scientific and hence 'definitive', is more an error of historical judgment than that it represents a factual situation, veiling Abelard's intent to the point of lifting him out of his twelfth-century context. A mind too great for his surroundings, he is seen as neither monk nor scholastic. With both verdicts simultaneously true and untrue, it is evident that a fundamental ambiguity characterizes him and his age. Complementing recent studies of Peter Abelard by Michael Clanchy and John Marenbon, the two chapters devoted to him here have only meant to put him back in the context where he belongs.

injury, though they well know it has been laid on them by divine dispensation, leave the path of righteousness and follow their own will rather than God's; they rebel in their secret hearts against the meaning of the words 'Thy will be done', and set their own will above the will of God. Farewell.' See also the end of Abelard's *Dialogue between a Christian, a Philosopher and a Jew*, where Abelard inserts this quote (*Fiat voluntas tua*) in a discussion of how some things are fittingly denied us by the plan devised by God. See *Collationes* 226, ed. and trans. Orlandi and Marenbon (Oxford, 2001), 222–23.

⁶³ See *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III. 48, CCCM 13: 520: *Voluntati eius quis resistet?* Abelard's quotation of Rom. 9:19 here is closely linked to his discussion of God's omnipotence, which he premises on his will. This leads to the controversial view that God cannot do other or better than he does, to the extent that where his will is absent, his power must be also. Abelard links the discussion of omnipotence to the issue of salvation. Rather than following Marenbon in treating this as a theodicy-issue (cf. Marenbon, *Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, 247–50), however, I favor the view that Abelard's theodicy must be integrated with his comprehensive ethics as yet another aspect.

CHAPTER SIX

TRAGEDY IN THE TWELFTH-CENTURY RHETORICAL IMAGINATION: BERNARD SILVESTRIS ON SUICIDE

I *Introduction: The Poetics of Paradise and Twelfth-Century Schools*

In most scholarly handbooks the twelfth century is considered a century of optimism. At least, that appears to be the appropriate mood when we talk about its well-known renaissance-quality. Following on the heels of the famous study by Charles Homer Haskins, we are tempted to see this age as breathing only vitality and renewal, for a budding and even blooming culture came into being right at this time.¹ However, in conformity with some of the findings in the earlier chapters, this chapter will deliberately try to complicate that picture, without questioning its general accuracy. The aim is not to defy all of the above as somehow untrue or superficial, but merely to point out how it fails to tell the whole story. While the perception of the twelfth century as a renaissance is helpful in the sense that it highlights some of the age's most remarkable developments, it thereby inevitably leaves out others, yielding in the end what is necessarily a selective view of the period seen in its entirety. Particularly—and this is where the need for complexity becomes most urgent—a renaissance perception of the twelfth century tends to omit how, underneath its bout of optimism, there were grave streaks of anxiety running through the age as well. To highlight the contours of the period along the research lines set out in the above chapters, I here want to focus more deeply on those oft-neglected undercurrents.

One of these has to do with the fickle fate that could befall its masters. For while the twelfth century was marked by a great activity

¹ See C.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1927); R. Benson and G. Constable (eds.), *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (1982; Toronto, 1991); G. Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1996); C.S. Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels. Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia, 1994).

and variety of schools and their masters, underscoring how it harbored a remarkably wide range of interests indeed, eventually only the fame of some masters carried the day. Peter Abelard, John of Salisbury, William of Conches, Thierry of Chartres, these were some of the leading minds who put their personal stamp on the intellectual developments that were going on in the various strands of learning at the time. Of these, furthermore, only a few still speak to the imagination today, foremost among them Peter Abelard. Not unlike the discussion about the validity and relevance of knowledge in chapters 3 and 4, which involved a much broader range of issues than scholastic epistemology alone, we will need to depict the twelfth-century scene here as a much broader one than that of the later 'winners'. While useful in and of itself, however, such a simple correction of the twelfth century's renaissance outlook does not add sufficient nuance, let alone complexity. To achieve the latter it is imperative somehow to peek underneath the success of one of these masters, so to speak. Only then can we see whether the triumph of some, comparable to the failure of others, reveals signs of an incipient disillusionment, thereby undergirding our general thesis of the age as radiating feelings of melancholy and anxiety alongside optimism and enthusiasm.

To start our analysis it is important to state how the various twelfth-century masters whom we already met in earlier chapters, found themselves in exhilarating but also in anxious and uncertain times.² Abelard's fame is a natural example in this regard, as it consisted in a mixture of academic brilliance, intellectual genius and quasi-postmodern celebrity annex notoriety.³ We have also seen how William of Conches proved an interesting case, and an underrated one too, as he left the schools disappointed, if not entirely disillusioned by the course of contemporary education, joining the court of Geoffrey le Bel Plantagenet. William's *Dragmaticon* is such an enticing work because its many-sidedness perfectly expresses the author's intellectual quandary. On the one hand the *Dragmaticon* reflects the teaching that went on in the schools, as they served for a long time

² See P. Godman, *The Silent Masters. Latin Literature and Its Censors in the High Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2001). Godman's study is especially apposite, since he discusses some of the same masters whom will be our topic here, notably, Abelard, Bernard Silvestris and Alan of Lille.

³ See M.T. Clanchy, *Peter Abelard. A Medieval Life* (Oxford, 1997), *passim*.

as his intellectual habitat, while at the same time it embodies a critical protest of the increasing narrowness of the school system. The combination of these two aspects gives the latter work a critical edge over William's earlier *Philosophia*. Typical of this edge, at least from a literary perspective, is how the text of the *Dragmaticon* reveals a certain mixture of self-awareness and self-consciousness. In this respect William's passages on the life-long quest of education provide us with interesting references, as what they seem to have in common is that they are all fundamentally anti-scholastic in nature. Still, in the end both the nature and the extent of his Platonic and pedagogical protest are hard to fathom for, far from leaping from the page, it appears the meaning of this protest needs to be quite literally squeezed and wrested from the texts themselves.

Notwithstanding the impact of William's critical voice, the sum total of the efforts of twelfth-century masters, irrespective of how well known they were individually, makes clear to us that the scholastic system was undeniably on its way in. The flipside of this state of affairs is, however, that it was not yet fully in place. This helps to explain why a master like William could feel so abandoned, not just by his increasingly calculating students but also, and perhaps even more so, by his peers. Feeling more and more backed into a corner by the members of his guild, it seems as if he was thinking out his thoughts in a kind of intellectual limbo, as he came to construct his own imaginative cosmological universe. While this universe may indeed have been conceived outside the scholastic guild, it would be a mistake to regard it therefore as privatized. On the contrary, it seems to contain messages precisely directed at the members of this new guild, as the contours of this group were still broad enough to allow for dissension.

Another way of putting all this is to state that this was the time of the first medieval intellectuals, as Jacques Le Goff called them,⁴ those free-ranging minds whom Johan Huizinga at an earlier stage had labeled 'pre-gothic spirits'.⁵ Here we need to draw attention to

⁴ See J. Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*, trans. T.L. Fagan (Oxford, 1993), 5–64.

⁵ Johan Huizinga, famous medievalist and author of *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, introduced the characterization 'esprits prégothiques' at a series of lectures held at the Sorbonne in 1930. He applied it to such leading twelfth-century minds as Abelard, John of Salisbury and Alan of Lille. See L. Nauta, 'Huizinga's Lente der

the particular circumstances of twelfth-century teaching. All these intellectuals were indeed true masters (*magistri*), inasmuch as they spent much of their time in the classroom, collecting their fame as a direct effort of their teaching efforts. Yet it is important to remember that then, far more than ever before or after in the Middle Ages, the classroom was an important public setting as well. The case may even be made that in the twelfth century the classroom was the public setting *par excellence*. This meant that it was relatively easy for the fame acquired there to spill over into the public square, whether it be the taverns, the monasteries or the courts, both royal and ecclesiastical. This public element clearly added to the visibility of these schoolmasters, even at the risk of putting undue emphasis on their teaching. Not only were they well aware of this situation but in some instances they appeared ready and eager to exploit it, as is illustrated most poignantly by—again—Peter Abelard.

Exploiting this fame proved to be a double-edged sword, however, for in addition to affording them certain privileges and highlighting their visibility, it seems that their growing reputation made these masters more aware of their boundaries and the need to heed them. Some of them felt a concrete need to engage in a kind of self-censure. In his insightful study *The Silent Masters* Peter Godman has recently made a convincing case for the emerging pressure of such self-censorship in the twelfth century.⁶ Acting as a first step in a wrong direction, Godman reveals, such self-censorship did not fail to yield various detrimental consequences, most pernicious among them the clouding over of its open intellectual climate, leading eventually to the undermining of the quality of its intellectual production. Collectively these and other effects may well have contributed to the demise of what I have labeled twelfth-century humanism.

This demise was enhanced by the fact that the scholarly projects in which the average schoolmaster tended to engage seemed to take

Middeleeuwen. De plaats van de twaalfde-eeuwse renaissance in zijn werk,' *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 108 (1995): 3–23, esp. 8. See also above my general introduction *Understanding Medieval Humanism*, pp. 2–3.

⁶ See especially Godman, *Silent Masters*, 3–31 on Abelard and Bernard. Underneath his emphasis on self-censorship, Godman's study reveals a keen awareness of the profound ambiguity of what Huizinga called the pre-gothic age. This focus on the overarching paradigm of the twelfth century helps to explain why on p. 348, the final page of his study, Godman can fittingly call the typical opponents Abelard and Bernard 'warring twins'.

on an increasingly orthodox and 'academic' character, in the sense that they heeded the formal and doctrinal requirements of the academy, i.e., the milieu of twelfth-century schools. The impact on these masters of the impending scholastic triumph, I wish to argue here, was that they gradually cut down on their imaginative and associative approach, thereby diminishing the traditional 'theologizing' quality of their texts. Paradoxically, the curtailment of such direct or indirect theologizing, which would inaugurate the end of comprehensive projects like the *Dragmaticon*, led at first to a kind of unleashing of a new creative potential rather than—what might have been expected—to its suppression. While exhibiting such close ties with the older tradition as to be called its fitting inheritor, this new creative streak manifested itself in the free and experimental use of literary devices. These could either reflect the author's updating of the traditional setting of the scene or his desire for a more contemporary vocabulary. The new literary potential thus manifesting itself can be seen to emerge in various specimens of twelfth-century poetry. Typical of the age's new creative strategies is the phenomenon that the older theologizing nature of the text begins to make room for a new, more contextual approach, in which the text functions as the *locus*, if not the arena, of a sophisticated hermeneutical debate. What the recent findings about self-censorship by Godman and others have brought home with full force, moreover, is that this debate was not just a surface discussion concerning hermeneutical frills that were largely redundant. Rather, what is at stake is the birth of a fundamentally new orientation on the ideal adequacy and cohesiveness of human knowledge as regards its meaning, relevance and future course of development.

As can be expected with any cultural transition, all this had not yet been fully settled around the middle of the twelfth century. Rather, to the degree that the twelfth century was a period of transition, the two approaches mentioned above, the older theologizing one and the more recent, hermeneutically informed strategy, seem to have existed side by side, possibly even cropping up in different works by the same author. Here we may think again of Abelard, but also of Alan of Lille.⁷ For a while it seemed as if the persistent

⁷ A more pertinent discussion of Alan in relation to the cultural paradigm of the age can be found in the next chapter.

threat of the orthodoxy-issue, especially in combination with the strain of self-censorship, induced some masters to hide behind scholastic patterns of erudition, whereas others were stimulated conversely to become more associative and more reliant on their imagination. And when as a group they collectively underwent the conforming spell of scholastic rhetoric, confined as most *magistri* were to classroom situations and their resulting pressures, adopting a pattern of dual accommodation could serve as a solution.

In this respect it is important to point out again how the tone and tenor of twelfth-century school language ranges far beyond the mere academic, a point which has too often been overlooked.⁸ The breadth and openness of its literary and semantic scope was possible thanks to the fact that the school system had not yet settled on a single and dominant method of study. To some extent, this breadth of scope can indeed be dismissed as an unforeseen side effect of the transition to scholasticism. More generally, however, it accords with and reflects the societal and intellectual visibility, perhaps even prominence, of the twelfth-century classroom setting. With a light variation on Huizinga's idea of 'pre-gothic spirits', and keeping in mind the co-existence of the various developmental strands treated here, perhaps we should label the more literary works of these masters 'para-scholastic' rather than pre-scholastic. While most or all of the time they served in a classroom setting, with some of the same masters authoring first-rate scholastic works,⁹ underneath their masterful display of didactic tricks and devices, they were engaged in a unique project of associative and evocative language. Most interestingly, by incorporating the experimental and the element of play in certified school texts, not just do they seem to mock these, but they seem to free up their language sufficiently to exude a transparency reflective of genuine intellectual vision. Although in a broad sense their literary use of language defied scholastic standards, yet the onset of scholasticism is what they apparently needed to bring out this vision, as without such a counterweight their poetry seems to lose focus.

Transparency of vision is what lends these texts the right modicum of coherence to compensate for whatever transgressions of

⁸ See on this the discussion on the School of Chartres in chapter 1.VI (The Chartrian Controversy) above.

⁹ See especially the survey of Alan of Lille's works in G.R. Evans, *Alan of Lille. The Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), 14–19.

scholastic boundaries they may well commit. Thus we are dealing with school texts whose coherence resides precisely in the fact that they betray a character which must ultimately be deemed 'un-school-like', meaning *non*—rather than *anti*-scholastic, even as they are largely designed for learning in the schools.¹⁰ Some of the texts involved acquired a reputation as veritable literary and even theological show-pieces, such as Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*. As a kind of thought experiment in this chapter, I want to suggest here that these literary exercises can at least in part be explained as a kind of comment-*cum*-protest against the straightjacket of scholastic form. Set against the background of the new trend of form taking priority over content, they continue the older tradition in which freedom of form was vital indeed to those wanting to complete 'the return to paradise'.

But while a certain transparency of vision underlies the various specimens of this para-scholastic rhetoric, thereby connecting them to the older tradition sketched above, it seems virtually impossible to read these texts in such a way as to produce a picture of impeccable clarity. The best way to understand their complexity of thought, therefore, directed as it was against scholastic compartmentalization in a valiant but eventually self-defeating attempt to defy it, may well be to regard it as belonging to the paradise-tradition. But as much as these texts still breathe the atmosphere of the older theologizing approach, it is clear that they are no longer firmly embedded in it.

This aspect of their being-out-of-place is the intellectual niche that this chapter has set out to analyze, as it can inform us on the ongoing fate of the paradise tradition in the twelfth century. From the unidentified beacon at the horizon of an array of early medieval texts, providing cogency and coherence in the absence of a clear program, we begin to notice how the ideal of paradise slowly transforms into a more stylized and deliberate, perhaps even contrived hermeneutical paradigm. In conformity with its role in para-scholastic literature, paradise acts as a paradigm that hovers over the creation of new literary texts without ever really landing there and establishing a genre. From a more or less fixed point of return, moreover, as it was inseparably connected to humanity's shared sense of origin, paradise now becomes internalized, thereby considerably adding

¹⁰ See J. Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex. The Meaning of Grammar to a Twelfth-Century Intellectual* (Cambridge M.A.: 1985), 77–107 on the place of grammar in the twelfth-century arts curriculum.

to the poet's possibilities of navigation. If in a next step we are to conclude that the evocative imagery of these texts defies easy domestication, this is in part because their authors skillfully set out to circumvent disciplinary control. In their poetic fantasy philosophy, theology and literature appear to blend in an entirely new way. Hence we should neither consign these texts to a single compartment of knowledge nor confine them to a particular didactic mode or intellectual system.¹¹ And yet these texts somehow hang together insofar as they seem to project a kindred intellectual vision, one whose originality lies in its unique alignment of authorial intent, philosophical coherence and poetic imagination.

Adding a new twist of fate, however, we have far from solved the desire for clarity touched upon in this section. For it appears that, however much we try to shed light on the intellectual program of these masters, it ironically seems as if the more we set out to analyze it, the more the precise nature of their poetry becomes obfuscated. In relation to the paradigmatic change of the age's literary sensibilities, this brings up the question where the ethereal wanderings of this associative literature are eventually supposed to take its readers.

II *Allegory, Integumentum and the Construction of Paradise*

Characteristic for the opaque luminosity of these texts, we may conclude, is the fact that a certain clarity of vision hides beneath an ever growing opulence of expression. This situation is complicated

¹¹ Stephen Jaeger, in his *The Envy of Angels. Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia, 1994), may be just a little too determined in separating out old learning from new ideals. When discussing Abelard's position as a critic of the old learning (pp. 229–236), he overlooks the fact that the debate was so heated at least in part because of Abelard's strong affinity with and loyalty to this older tradition. The case can be made that Abelard's opposition was not at all directed at forcing a break with the past, but rather at forging a workable sense of continuity that was intellectually responsible. On the other hand, G.R. Evans is too determined in wishing to see an organic development from the older, early-medieval tradition to the rise of scholasticism. See her *Old Arts and New Theology. The Beginnings of Theology as an Academic Discipline* (Oxford, 1980), 91–136. For example, Evans states on p. 91: 'Twelfth-century scholars studied the working of their mental processes in a way which has no parallel in earlier medieval thought, and they found that they needed a new vocabulary to describe the different modes of reasoning and reflection which they were beginning to recognize.'

even further by the fact that the authors' dexterous handling of poetic imagery is meant both to veil and to unveil the thought complex that they want to convey. At this point it may be opportune to pursue this point by dwelling on their precise poetic technique. We have already discussed the growing popularity of *integumentum*, an interpretive technique of a fundamentally learned character. This technique was applied in other fields of study beside poetry as well, notably philosophy. As indicated in the second chapter,¹² the inherent strength of the concept of 'covering' (*integumentum*) was that it allowed for a distinction between the presentation of a text as a finished and crafted literary product and its hidden kernel of philosophical or theological truth. Not unlike the difference found in biblical texts between the letter and the spirit, an exegetical strategy first recommended by St. Paul whereby the spiritual meaning is lifted out of its literal encasement,¹³ the concept of *integumentum* admonishes one in similar fashion to peel away various external layers. While it does so first and foremost with canonical texts of a non-biblical nature, such as Plato's *Timaeus* or Vergil's *Aeneid*, Abelard could apply this same device to biblical materials as well. A residual problem of *integumentum*, however, is that it displays a certain iconoclastic pull vis-à-vis traditional hermeneutical boundaries. Given the ever more ornate and creative nature of twelfth-century 'integral' interpretations, which all needed to be deciphered and held together, it is thus understandable that the use of this device could lead to the construction of an entirely new genre of creative poetry. It also meant that the difference between a commentary or gloss on the one hand and a creative text on the other slowly but surely

¹² See ch. 2 above, pp. 62–65.

¹³ See 2 Cor. 3:6: *littera enim occidit, Spiritus autem vivificat*. It should not be forgotten that this allegorical distinction has a semi-historical background in the narrative connection between and quasi-succession of Old and New Testament teaching. Thus we can regard this motto as the literary translation of Paul's attempt to see a straight line from Judaism to the teaching of Christ. In *On Christian Doctrine*, where he is chiefly engaged in distinguishing literal from figurative language, Augustine sketches a genealogy of religion which goes from the literalism of pagan worship through the moderate slavery of Judaism to the liberation of Christianity, see *De doctrina christiana* III.v.ix.20–x.xiv.34, ed. Green, pp. 140–48. For an analysis of Augustine's pivotal role in reading scripture in this way and its lasting effects, see W. Otten, 'The Pedagogical Aspect of Eriugena's Eschatology: Paradise Between the Letter and the Spirit,' in: *History and Eschatology in John Scottus Eriugena and His Time*, eds J. McEvoy and M. Dunne (Leuven, 2002), 511–16.

disappeared.¹⁴ Here some background explanation about the literary use of *integumenta* may be in order.

The fact that there existed no explicit poetic or Platonic warrant for the use of *integumentum* comparable to St. Paul's recommendation to read Scripture allegorically,—although in the commentary tradition Macrobius made some pertinent comments—,¹⁵ added to rather than detracted from its evocative power, magical allure and referential range. St. Paul's other statement in Rom. 1:20,¹⁶ by which he had sanctioned the deeper investigation of nature as an entry to God's hidden nature, facilitated further parallels, as allegorical exegesis and integumental commentary became closely linked, especially as far as the *Timaeus* was concerned. In the absence of clear theological reading-rules, as there was no philosophical equivalent of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, it was left up to the scrutiny and sensibility of the author to find out the hidden meaning of a whole range of obscure and pagan images in preparation of their application. More so than either allegorical exegesis or cosmological interpretation, therefore, for which there was a stable philosophical frame of reference,¹⁷ the use of *integumentum* invited polyvalence and ambiguity to settle between the words and their intended meaning. In a counter-development to the general scholastic trend and to the increasingly narrow and institutional interpretation of *sacramentum* in the twelfth century,¹⁸ with which it ironically seemed to go hand in

¹⁴ Whereas Bernard of Chartres and William of Conches wrote glosses on Plato's *Timaeus* and Bernard Silvestris on Vergil's *Aeneid*, later on it seems authors preferred to give their comments on the tradition in the form of creative texts of their own, such as Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia*. The ultimate success of this paradigm shift is borne out by Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*. No longer seen as merely an example to follow, the *Anticlaudianus* took on the stature of a canonical text to gloss. It became elevated to a classic of the scholastic tradition, on which historically it actually offers a lateral comment.

¹⁵ See above chapter 4, p. 167 n. 71.

¹⁶ Rom. 1:20: *Invisibilia enim ipsius, a creatura mundi, per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur.*

¹⁷ The partial translation of the *Timaeus* with commentary by Chalcidius maintained its authority throughout much of the twelfth century, although it gradually broadened into a wider Platonic matrix. See on this T. Gregory, 'The Platonic Inheritance,' in Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, 54–80. For this Platonic matrix, see also ch. 7 below.

¹⁸ The breadth of the notion of *sacramentum* can obviously be seen from Hugh of St. Victor's classic *De sacramentis christianae fidei*, which is a comprehensive account of Christian teaching. For more twelfth-century context on the debate about the sacraments, see P. Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages c. 200–c. 1150*

hand, it is as if idiosyncratic interpretation came to reign supreme. Thus it became ever more difficult to distinguish between creative authorship and the craft of literary interpretation. From a hermeneutical perspective the authors took pride in erecting complex works of art precisely because these edifices allowed them not only to express themselves in and through them, but also to hide behind them.

Taking the use of *integumentum* seriously as a prevalent and privileged device in twelfth-century learned interpretation, helps to explain its intellectual and semantic conundrums. On the one hand individual words and concepts such as 'truth' or 'cosmos' could take on different meanings while, on the other, a range of different words could denote a single concept. The extraordinary mixing of language's so-called intensional (or logical) and extensional (or ontological) functions, with which we respectively indicate the characterizing marks of a term that make up the corresponding concept and the things that are subsumed under the term,¹⁹ yielded a series of remarkably innovative literary texts. Not only did they form a literary-philosophical patchwork of sorts, but their very composition opened up an entirely new realm of evocation as well, due to the interaction between different layers of poetic ambiguity. If anywhere, it is in this new realm of evocation disclosed by these oddly ambiguous poetic texts that the ideal of paradise comes alive with fresh power. If we add to this that these texts were didactic showpieces written for classroom use, thereby suggesting some form of clarity to their audience, it becomes increasingly understandable why some of their messages were either not received at all or, alternatively, could fall victim to persistent misunderstanding. Factoring in all the nuances mentioned, we can only conclude that a certain asymmetry between text and understanding was bound to arise, with a further skewing of the balance nearly unavoidable.

(Cambridge, 1983), 221–66. See also J.H. van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz*, 119–30, 135–76.

¹⁹ The application of this terminology to problems of ancient and medieval semantics is elaborated by L.M. de Rijk in the first of what subsequently became a series of articles in *Vivarium*. De Rijk follows Gottlob Frege in claiming that two correlated entities are associated with the use of a term as sign (*Zeichen*), namely sense, intension or connotation (Frege's *Sinn*) and referent, extension or denotation (Frege's *Bedeutung*). See 'On Ancient and Medieval Semantics and Metaphysics,' *Vivarium* 15 (1977): 81–110, esp. 86–88.

To explain how and why all this happened, it is necessary to pursue the comparison with the familiar device of allegory a bit further. As in the practice of late ancient and early Christian allegory, the use of *integumentum* is characterized by the fact that in its form and content make for a literary relationship whose complexity dissolves ultimately in the underlying presupposition of their complementarity. Yet in the twelfth century this bond of complementarity became increasingly stretched, making the interpretive task an ever more difficult one. Due to the mixing of the intensional and extensional use of language, moreover, not only did the complex bond of complementarity stretch to the breaking point, but it also started to paint the texts in new colors. It is as if their collage character made them take on what seemed to be a third dimension. In line with what I argued above, I call this the paradise dimension. Yet what is different in this creative poetry compared to the centuries before, is the fact that the function of paradise seems to fade increasingly into that of a literary paradigm, allowing the poet to cast a meaningful future, construct a just society even, without the express condition of a corresponding reality.²⁰

While we have already touched upon many of the implications of this above, one element needs to be added here, as it regards the specific role of the author as artist. I like to label this so-called third dimension as the idea of 'paradise under construction', as it points to a particular transitional role. Emphasizing the use of paradise as a mediating and communicative image explains not only why the budding intellectual vision of these poets cannot be deduced from any of its individual building blocks, but it also makes clear that the evocative power of twelfth-century poetry transcends the inspiration of individual artists. The latter view would not just involve a romantic misreading of these poems, but it would above all imply a severe misunderstanding of the creativity and flexibility lodged in the entire *corpus* of the liberal arts, as these had been taught and transmitted continually throughout the medieval period. Due to the creativity stored in the liberal arts tradition, for a long time there existed hardly any difference between the teaching of grammar in a classroom set-

²⁰ Augustine foreshadows this creative aspect of allegory, especially of biblical allegory. See D. Dawson, 'Sign Theory, Allegorical Reading, and the Motions of the Soul in *De Doctrina Christiana*,' in: D. Arnold and P. Bright Kannengiesser (eds), *De doctrina christiana—a Classic of Western Culture* (Notre Dame, 1995), 123–41.

ting, as Anselm of Canterbury had done, and the teaching of theological matters, as he had done in much the same way.²¹ In fact, it seems as if the practice of integumental composition and interpretation, functioning as a sort of condensed form of this venerable tradition, began to serve as a catalyst by giving it a new lease on life. Yet in contrast to earlier times, it did so amid increasing competition from newer and narrower disciplines which were just now coming into their own, such as philosophy, law and theology in a strict sense.²²

In my view the secret behind the traditional teaching of the arts had been to allow creativity and craft to merge to such an extent that they could no longer be separated. With theology turning slowly into a separate and specialized discipline, as a consequence it lost its former 'theologizing' hold on knowledge *per se*. The most promising new arena to reveal a comparable structural openness was poetry, a field that was both solidifying and striving for a swift intellectual emancipation at the same time. The above development makes clear that the para-scholastic poetry produced by these masters can to some extent indeed be regarded as a true *creatio ex nihilo*. While this observation helps to explain why the misnomer of artistic autonomy could arise in evaluating these poems, it makes it no less excusable for historians to exclude their contribution from most standard intellectual surveys. The deeper problem may well be that, once called into being, these poems reveal such complexity that they effectively ward off any attempts to peek into the abyss by which the artist succeeded in creating something from nothing. As a result readers and scholars alike felt dissuaded for a long time to complete the normal quest for origins by tracking down other than artistic reasons for their creative production.

²¹ For the connection between grammar and theology in Anselm, see S. Gersh, 'Anselm of Canterbury,' in: P. Dronke (ed.), *A History of Western Twelfth-Century Philosophy*, 255–78. Combining the two, M.B. Pranger speaks of Anselm's principle of cogency. See his *The Artificiality of Christianity. Essays on the Poetics of Monasticism* (Stanford, 2003), 151–76 ('Anselm's Brevity').

²² This development is generally described in R.W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*. Volume II: The Heroic Age (Oxford, 2001), 3–147 (chs. 1–9). See also vol. I: Foundations (Oxford, 1995) ch. 9 (about Gratian and the development of law) and vol. II ch. 9 (on Peter Lombard and scholastic theology). Oddly, Southern does not pay much attention to the arts or to philosophy/logic as a separate discipline from theology. In this respect his chapter on Abelard (vol. II, ch. 7) falls remarkably short.

As we are still largely treading on unknown ground, therefore, the paradise-paradigm proves especially valuable as a heuristic tool. Just as the creation-metaphor helps us to contextualize God's transcendence by setting off divine infinity against dependent creation, so the mediating 'construction of paradise'-idea helps to draw our attention away from the all-powerful author, inviting us to deal with the abyss of artistic creation in circumspect fashion. Translated into historical terms, then, the fact that such an abyss is still perceived to exist after the middle of the twelfth century when the intellectual landscape had been largely mapped out, signals how the cultural function of poetry was undergoing a remarkable shift. With the motions of ambiguous meaning now being gradually replaced by a fixed horizon of truth, the nature of this poetic-paradisical truth revealed a sharp contrast with scholastic teaching, to the extent that it was as much human as it could claim to be divine.

But matters were more complicated still. We saw in earlier chapters how twelfth-century authors drawn to the use of *integumentum* operated in an intellectual and institutional setting that became increasingly sensitive to the dangers inherent in Christian allegory. Certainly, throughout its long life the use of allegory had always been clouded by matters of right doctrine. Calls for the setting up of new boundaries and regulations whereby to distinguish correct from incorrect allegorical practice could thus repeatedly be heard. The question of the World Soul—whether or not it could be identified with the Holy Spirit—can serve as an important touchstone, as both Abelard and William of Conches literally had 'to watch their language' in order not to transgress these and other rules of scholastic theology.²³ Orthodoxy-issues like these, however, became increasingly compounded just now by the fact that new definitions were being drawn up, for the first time ever in fact, as with the Lombard's excursion on the sacraments.²⁴ Thus we see the transition from 'theologizing' to 'theological' texts starting to have an effect.

Causing substantial unrest and lasting acrimonious battles for over a century as it did, the question may be asked whether this transi-

²³ See above ch. 2.III A (Rhetoric and Cosmology in the School of Chartres).

²⁴ See Cramer, *Baptism and Change*, 252–62. For a contextualized view of the Lombard's approach to sacraments, see also M. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden, 1994), Vol. II: 516–698.

tion has ever truly been completed,²⁵ and if so, whether it has been satisfactorily settled. Due to the rapid triumph of the scholastic method and the growing stability of the school system, however, we conveniently tend to forget that new orthodoxy-rules were drafted until far into the thirteenth century, as the works of well-known scholastics like Thomas Aquinas also suffered under accusations of Aristotelian contamination. By that time an important layer of the older, broader theological tradition, viz. its creative and associative use of poetic language, had already been peeled off and found its way into other genres of literary expression, notably poetry, injecting it with new meaning. When in 1327 pope John XXII passed the bull *In agro dominico* it may well have put an end to any hope of a possible reunion of literature, in the paradisaical sense, and theology, in the scholastic sense, as with a single stroke of the pen he condemned the scholastic author Eckhart, while implicitly confirming the earlier condemnation of a woman mystic like Marguerite Porete.²⁶ Henceforth the realms of literature and theology would be forever separated, until Dante was to combine—but not reunite—they one last time in his masterful ‘reconstruction of paradise’.²⁷

The above view sketches the situation not just from the perspective of the institutional leadership of the church but also from that of the future fate of the formalized academic disciplines. However this may be, it would be a bad case of history if we were to project the entire story back onto the twelfth century. These and other institutional consequences aside—both ecclesial and academic, as on the point of vision they were still intertwined—it is important to

²⁵ R.W. Southern thinks so, as the overarching thesis of his two volumes on *Scholastic Humanism* is that in twelfth-century scholastic education the foundations were laid for a Europe-wide university system whose hallmark is clarity. See Vol. I: *Foundations* (Oxford, 1995), 1–13.

²⁶ See M.A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago, 1994), 116–45 (‘Apophysis of Desire and the Burning of Marguerite Porete’), pp. 147–79 (‘Meister Eckhart: Birth and Self-Birth’), and especially 180–205 for the connections between Porete and Eckhart (‘Porete and Eckhart: The Apophysis and Gender’). See also R. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, 1972), 71–78; 182–208.

²⁷ On Dante’s medieval roots, see P. Dronke, *Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions* (1986; Cambridge, 1988). In responding to Benedetto Croce’s view of Dante’s *Commedia* as a ‘theological romance’, Dronke points to its ties with writings of prophetic and visionary inspiration, among which he counts the works of Marguerite Porete, see p. 3 n. 8 (pp. 126–27).

stress here how the general context of twelfth-century interpretive practice was still breathing the air of new prospects and exhilarating possibilities. In fact, with allegorical and 'integumental' interpretation growing closer, a new freedom of reading seemed to present itself alongside the narrowing of options and the chastening of doctrine. For a while 'theologizing' and 'theological' interpretation, in a Platonic marriage of sorts, could even be applied interchangeably, so it seems, benefiting the emergence of a new and reinvigorated encyclopedic outlook. At the far end of this we have Abelard's interpretation, touched upon in the last chapter, of Christ's parables as themselves representing a kind of *integumenta*, their most conspicuous feature being that the divine Word himself had sanctioned the chosen medium.

Two features stand out as notable characteristics of this new, typically twelfth-century mentality, whereby 'integumental' interpretation could embrace traditional allegory to the point of absorbing it. The first is that, in contradistinction to the use of allegory in early Christianity, a direct biblical warrant was not (yet) seen as an absolutely necessity for orthodox doctrine by twelfth-century authors. In the chapter on William of Conches, for example, we observed how the *Timaeus* held a special attraction for those authors interested in the process of creation. If it is true, as Abelard argued explicitly, that the divine Word himself sanctioned the integumental approach, then additional legitimization in individual cases would prove altogether redundant. The second feature touches on the degree of creativity allowed to those engaging in this kind of interpretation, especially in instances where pagan testimony was not immediately reconcilable with Christian interpretation, as was the case in both William and Abelard. From this angle it becomes better understandable why this interpretive approach kindled excessive literary and exegetical dexterity in various authors. As the possibilities and problems of this new mentality come together most fascinatingly in poetry, the remainder of this chapter shall be devoted to one important specimen, namely Bernard Silvestris' *Mathematicus*.²⁸

Adding a final layer of complexity, we need to mention one last problem before looking at the poem at hand. As was indicated above,

²⁸ I have consulted the recent text and translation by Deirdre M. Stone. See her 'Bernardus Silvestris, *Mathematicus*. Edition and Translation,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 63 (1996): 209–83.

the freedom of reading that was opened up applies not just to the authors but also to the readers of these poetic texts, to the extent that the process of reading, taken in a wide sense, encompasses both composition and interpretation. In fact, it is typical of twelfth-century *integumentum* that it is hard to distinguish between what the author tries to communicate by deliberately 'covering' his ideas in words and images, and what theologico-philosophical message hiding underneath these samples of poetic display the reader is supposed to unveil. The dynamics of reading and writing are fully interactive. The partial overlap of the author's attempt at veiling and the reader's at unveiling, yielding an unusual and constant interplay of covering and uncovering, lends just one more hue of ambiguity to the growing opacity of twelfth-century poetic texts.

In the remainder of this chapter I shall analyze the arising ambiguity of vision predominantly as a concomitant effect of the complex hermeneutics involved in this new kind of intellectual poetry. If we next press on with a single case, that of Bernard Silvestris' didactic poem the *Mathematicus*, my analysis shall treat this poetic text accordingly, regarding it neither as the product of technical craft nor as based on artistic inspiration alone. While the above conclusion reflects the perspective of the author, something similar could be expressed about the perspective of the readers, which should be nuanced so as to see them neither as unique ambassadors of the text's message nor as the poem's sole addressees. The latter point will be of concern in the final chapter on Alan of Lille.

Refusing easy control or access to both author and reader(s), be it medieval or modern ones, the poetical texts at hand thus display a remarkable independence. Standing aloof from the laws of both composition and interpretation, their most poignant expressiveness may well lie in their ability somehow to cover the growing space between them. Taking these and other observations into account, we should be well aware that what it is these poems wish to communicate is a question which we have thus merely begun to pose. As the answer is naturally complex, a more explicit analysis is in order.

III *Poetry and Theory*

If there is one thing that is clear among students of twelfth-century poetic texts, it is that these texts are of keen importance in helping

us to throw light upon the intellectual and moral culture and climate of the period under scrutiny. While figures like Bernard Silvestris and William of Conches continue to attract the attention of scholars interested in both myth and natural science,²⁹ more recently a new focus on the educational program in which they were involved has begun to confer new relevance and fresh meaning on their texts.³⁰ There is one further methodological aspect that I particularly want to highlight, as it allows us to reach a more meaningful analysis of the text of Bernard Silvestris under review. Interestingly, it appears that the degree to which poems as those by Bernard Silvestris—but we may add those of Alan of Lille and others here, such as John of Hautville's *Architrenius*—have gained in importance is directly proportionate to the degree in which traditional *Ideengeschichte* has given way to *New Historicism*.³¹ While the latter approach has become explicitly known for bringing so-called low-cultural texts into the equation—contextualizing traditional Shakespearean masterpieces, for example, by teaming them up with lesser known and rather less polished literary texts—with some adjustments this approach can offer new ways to interpret high-cultural texts as well.³² Opening up ways

²⁹ See for the particular combinations of myth and science: B. Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century. A Study of Bernard Silvestris* (Princeton, 1972). See further W. Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century. The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres* (Princeton, 1972); W. Wetherbee, 'Philosophy, cosmology and the twelfth-century Renaissance,' in: *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, ed. P. Dronke (Cambridge: 1988), 21–53; Ch. Burnett, 'Scientific speculations,' in: Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth-Century Western Philosophy*, 151–76.

³⁰ The fact that the authors' individual stances are closely linked to the institutional setting of the cathedral schools is the main theme running through Jaeger's *Envy of Angels* (Philadelphia, 1994), 239–329.

³¹ There is a wealth of literature on this, in which the name of Stephen Greenblatt is central. See e.g., C. Gallagher and St. Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago, 2001). See also the earlier review article by J.H. Zammuto, 'Are We Being Theoretical Yet? The New Historicism, the New Philosophy of History, and "Practicing Historians,"' *The Journal of Modern History* 65 (1993): 783–814.

³² Due perhaps to the influence of Geertz's idea, stemming from his anthropological practice, of a 'thick description' of cultures [cf. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973)], New Historicists display a keen interest in connecting high to low culture. Their motive is that low culture is not given a voice in critical literary theory. In a sense, my interests are the opposite, as I want to explain how—as a result of the stifling monopoly of scholastic practice—certain twelfth-century authors representative of this period's high culture were likewise being deprived of a voice. In my view, which I will develop more in depth in the next chapter, the encyclopedic nature of the period's high culture made it vulnerable for extinction once a new and more clear-cut intellectual method was put in place.

in which a crafted text like the *Mathematicus* can be brought down from its pedestal is a first step in letting it inform us more directly about its cultural background.

In general, the advantage of this so-called contextualizing approach is that it allows us to develop a broader view of the poetic texts at hand. In conformity with what I argued above, we can see this view as more in line with the broader horizon which they seem to project. In the case of poets like Bernard, representing a Platonic mentality soon to be superseded, the expressiveness of their poetry tends to be read in an unduly restrictive way. In contrast, the contextualizing approach invites us to shift focus in a new and exciting manner. Abdicating from a view in which Bernard and others are seen as 'mere' poets, we are challenged to elaborate a more complex view of these poets and their work in their role as intellectual critics of the dominant mindset of their age. Rather than keeping a strict measure of their poetic message by judging it according to contemporaneous intellectual standards,³³ therefore, I here propose a different course of study. Given that these standards were increasingly dictated by narrow definitions of orthodoxy and morality as a result of the developing school system and the growing institutional hold on it, the chief value of these poems was to provide their contemporaries with a broad platform for discussion. Thus they open up a unique perspective on the intellectual predicament of the age by showing us the delicate quandary in which twelfth-century intellectuals found themselves.

Initiating us into the obvious problem areas of the twelfth century, such as the position of the World Soul or the role and meaning of the sacraments, these texts reveal to us how underneath such issues of doctrine a deep unrest was underlying the intellectual innovations

³³ Here my approach differs slightly from that of Godman's in his article 'Ambiguity in the *Mathematicus* of Bernardus Silvestris,' *Studi medievali serie terza* XXXI, 2 (1990): 583–648, tending more towards his elaborated vision in *The Silent Masters* (Princeton, 2000), 228–293 (ch. VII: The Open Work) as well as towards the approach found in Peter von Moos, *Geschichte als Topik. Das rhetorische Exemplum von der Antike zur Neuzeit und die historiae in 'Poliraticus' Johanns von Salisbury* (Hildesheim/New York, 1988), 238–286 (on 'thinking in alternatives'). See also Von Moos, chapter IV: Das Exemplum zwischen Philosophie und Geschichtsinteresse im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance, 503–555, esp. at 555: 'Exempla sind zeitlos, frei von der Not und Enge des geschichtlichen Einmaligen. Darum eignen sie sich als Orientierungshilfen bei der Suche nach einem philosophischen *certum* in der historischen Welt der Ungewißheiten'.

of the age. In short, poems like these are jointly foreboding, expressing, and mirroring the imminent transitions and transformations of the twelfth century. Although they do so in a reflexive and perhaps inchoate manner, and we have to be weary of reading them with the historical knowledge of hindsight, their ambiguity need not detract from their signaling quality any more than the precision of ordinary classroom logic adds to the clarity of scholasticism. What matters above all—and here I venture a criticism of many a study of the twelfth-century renaissance—is that neither the one nor the other, neither texts marked by ambiguity nor those stamped by clarity, are normative for the entire age based on that criterion alone. The difference in appreciation of clarity *versus* ambiguity is ultimately more a matter of taste or intellectual predilection than that it adequately indicates a historical renaissance or decline. This leaves undisputed my contention that, due largely to its ‘integumental’ form, a poem like Bernard Silvestris’ *Mathematicus*, however didactic in nature, communicates to us a kind of reflexive self-awareness that is lacking in many scholastic texts, wrapped up as they are in the format of the new approach itself. Exploring this self-awareness, then, may well be our only chance of gaining access to the implicit criticism of the current scholastic mentality which they embody, however prudently and latently expressed. The difficulty lies not just in unearthing this criticism, but especially in gauging the positive ideals that they want to project. For they do remain, after all, school texts aiming at instruction.

A. *Nature* versus *Nurture*

A good example of such a contextualizing approach is found in the recent book by Mark Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy*, as it contains one of the best discussions of Alan of Lille’s prosimetric work *Plaint of Nature*.³⁴ As the content and story-line of the *Plaint* have already

³⁴ See M.D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago, 1997), 67–91 (Alan of Lille: Natural Artifices). I am inclined to associate Jordan with a method loosely approximating that of the New Historicists, that is, in my changed version of contextualizing and criticizing scholastic culture by bringing out ‘high-cultural’ counter-voices as well. Both Peter Damian and Alan of Lille qualify in that respect, even though they never broke out of their institutional and ecclesiastical bounds. This may in fact have given them more liberty to experiment with this kind of poetry.

been discussed in the second chapter, here it suffices to repeat how in this poem a personified Lady Nature complains about the injuries done to her by humanity, including acts of sexual violation. A difficult aspect of Alan's poem *qua* interpretation has always been the way in which sexual and grammatical transgression seemed to overlap, raising the question of which discourse serves as metaphor for which. In terms of depicting graphic decline, moreover, this poem seems to contain a medieval version of the nature *versus* nurture-dilemma.

If so, this conclusion raises a variety of questions about how to approach it. Should we see it as a grammatical school piece made more enticing by the use of sexually charged rhetoric, or as a moral lament about sexual perversion merely made palatable to a broader audience by being covered in grammatical analogies?³⁵ In his chapter on Alan, which follows an earlier chapter on that other famous master of the arts, Peter Damian,³⁶ Jordan touches specifically on the difficult relationship between the poetic covering of Alan's text, the so-called *integumentum* or its mythical plot, and its underlying meaning, featuring sexual deviation and irregularity. According to Jordan, the focus of whose study is on all matters sexual but pivots around the issue of sodomy, the point of Alan's poem is not so easy to pin down as one might perhaps have expected. In the final analysis he considers Alan's *Plaint* a broad attempt to remind the narrator—who interestingly appears on the stage as a poet inside what is at least a semi-poetic work—how to tell 'fiction' from 'fact'. In light of such a straightforward insight, it might appear as if the right moral cure would require a re-education in discernment,³⁷ a moral make-over, so to speak, along the lines with which Abelard teaches us a theological make-over, but instead Alan's conclusions aim much higher. Choosing to unstitch all fictions, to deny all representation

³⁵ It seems either option is one-sided by twelfth-century standards and hence undesirable. Moreover, either option falls short in view of a more New Historicist-like approach. While Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex* (Cambridge MA, 1985) is generally more traditional, it carefully avoids such stereotypical one-sidedness. See e.g., *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex*, 1–12.

³⁶ I actually think Jordan's chapter on Damian (*The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*, 45–66) is generally weaker, because he does not leave room for the same rhetorical ambiguity that he so rightly observed in Alan. In my opinion his accusation that Damian forces homosexuals in the closet by making their sin unforgivable mistakes the eleventh-century monastic cell for the modern-day closet in ways that simplify eleventh-century rhetoric as a rising force of ambiguous power.

³⁷ See Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 74.

in moral matters, he leaves us in an even greater state of ambiguity than the reader was in before.³⁸ In the specific terminology of sexual offense, his poem on Nature signals to us how the prohibition of same-sex copulation is ultimately something which Nature may well lament, but which reflects at the same time a possibility inherent in her very being. Moral rules, in other words, can never be satisfactorily based on natural regulations. Neither can morality be derived from grammatical regulations, for that matter. Or can it? In the remarkable sequel to the *Plaint*, the *Anticlaudianus*, we encounter all the arts, including those of the *trivium* among which grammar, making a concerted effort to create a New Man. This brings us back to Ziolkowski's claim about Alan that grammar is subsumed under ethics in the twelfth century, as it relates to questions about the weakness of will and hence introduces us to the need for reform and re-formation.³⁹

B. *Moral or Immortal Man?*

A new moral man, that is also what Stephen Jaeger mentions in his study called *The Envy of Angels* as the educational ideal put forth by the cathedral schools of early medieval Europe, an ideal which he considers to have climaxed in the twelfth century. He fittingly speaks of the ideal man in this regard, as for him moral reform is the main point indeed which Bernard Silvestris in his *Cosmographia* but especially Alan of Lille in his *Anticlaudianus* came to emphasize. The ideal man's demeanor, his education, and his ethics make him a fitting and perfect hero for the entire human race. Yet Jaeger's conclusions are of an even more sweeping nature. Reverting to the older statement by Richard Southern that twelfth-century humanism tended to make God seem human, he simply and surprisingly turns it around, arguing now that this humanism made man seem godlike.⁴⁰ To all intents and purposes, the *Anticlaudianus* may well seem to be a striking example indeed of this line of reasoning. In it we find personified

³⁸ See Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 72–87.

³⁹ See Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex*, 5.

⁴⁰ See Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 280: 'R.W. Southern claims that the greatest accomplishment of twelfth-century humanism was "to make God seem human. . . ." I would argue the reverse: it made man seem godlike. Discipline and learning deified the student'.

Lady Nature, who has become weary of reform, opting to make a clean break altogether by fashioning a New Man, an *alter Adam* as I have begun to refer to him.⁴¹ While I want to be cautious of over-romanticizing the New Man, in the same way as before I have wanted not to over-romanticize twelfth-century poetry, the very emergence of the ideal of a New Man seems to bring out the failure of the older tradition of lament or *planctus*. This older tradition of a comprehensive and continuing education which had inspired Abelard and could be found dominating Alan's earlier *Plaint* can no longer be reconciled with the new ideal of a more hands-on and increasingly monodisciplinary education. When reform is neither possible nor feasible any longer, re-creation becomes the new goal. Henceforth the new school system, which we have grown accustomed to label scholasticism, will be normative for the education of most students, with monastic students increasingly following their own spiritual path.

But by then we have already reached the end of the twelfth century, as the *Anticlaudianus* was written in the 1190s. With Bernard Silvestris we are still in the middle of the century, however, and reform in the older sense is still a viable option. What is also clear is that the ideals of this reform were chiefly promulgated by literary means, i.e., through the writing of poetry, but also, as in the case of Bernard of Clairvaux's great sermon *On Conversion*,⁴² through sermons or letters.⁴³ My own emphasis here is on finding out more

⁴¹ See ch. 1.VII (The End of Twelfth-Century Humanism), p. 43 above, where I have stated my objections to Evans' notion of *alter Christus*. I will come back to the New Man below in chapter 7.

⁴² See Bernard's *Ad clericos de conversione* in: J. Leclercq and H.M. Rochais (eds.), *Sancti Bernardi Opera* IV (Rome, 1957–1977), 69–116. On the relation between monastic conversion and intellectual learning as one between eschatological and historical humanism, see J. Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God. A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. C. Misrahi (1961; New York, ³1982), 112–50. It seemed this natural connection came under siege in the twelfth century by reformers like Bernard. As McGinn has argued on the basis of an older argument by Maur Standaert, Bernard plays with the *imago-similitudo* likeness of man to God by varying on the psychological themes of *formatio*, *deformatio* and *reformatio*. See B. McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism. Gregory the Great through the Twelfth Century* (New York, 1994), 158–224, esp. p. 172. Whereas Bernard uses a strategy of interiorization, as will increasingly be the case inside the monastic tradition, Bernard Silvestris and Alan realize a similar reforming effect through the more indirect approach of mythologizing. This corresponds with my remarks in ch. 1.VII on *poiesis* versus *mimesis*, see pp. 39–44 above.

⁴³ Bernard's collected sermons on the *Song of Songs* can be approached as forming

precisely what role poetry can be seen to play in all this. The reason is not just that many of the greatest minds of the period worked with and through poetry, but especially that only in poetry do we find the particular combination of integumental interpretation, as a kind of extension of the older 'theologizing' tradition, and moral reform. To complicate things even further, it appears that the existence of this combination does not only form a remarkable testimony to the strength of the older tradition of remembering paradise, but also foreshadows the new agenda of paradise-under-construction into which this older tradition was slowly becoming transmogrified. This makes the evaluation of this poetry particularly difficult and complex, as it appears to transcend the boundaries of conventional genre, if it does not deny them altogether. For one, does poetry merely represent the pleasant voice of eloquence here, is it a useful didactic mode of instruction or does it have a special moralizing quality of its own?

One way for scholars to solve these and other problems has been to look into the theory of poetics that was being developed at the time.⁴⁴ Above I have made repeated mention of the important device of *integumentum*. One might add to this the name of its close ally of *involutum* or 'enveloping' which also played a pivotal role. Bernard Silvestris, our author at hand here, definitely employs both concepts, as he comments on their respective uses in his *Commentary on Martianus Capella*, the late ancient author whose handbook on the liberal arts exercised such a widespread influence on the educational theory of the early Middle Ages.⁴⁵ When trying to solve the particular prob-

a unique poetical corpus of sorts. The most recent comprehensive analysis of Bernard's 'poetology' is M.B. Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought. Broken Dreams* (Leiden, 1994).

⁴⁴ On twelfth-century poetics, see P. Mehtonen, *Old Concepts and New Poetics. Historia, Argumentum, and Fabula in the Twelfth—and Early Thirteenth-Century Latin Poetics of Fiction* (Helsinki, 1996).

⁴⁵ Although this commentary is usually attributed to Bernard Silvestris, Michael Evans has attributed it to a certain 'Odo'. See his 'The *Ysagoge in theologiam* and the Commentaries Attributed to Bernard Silvestris,' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 (1991): 1–42, cited in Mehtonen, *Old Concepts and New Poetics*, 45–46. The more recent treatment of Bernard Silvestris by Peter Godman adheres to the older attribution, based on the fact that if the commentary on the Aeneid is Bernard's, then so is the commentary on Martianus Capella. See Godman, *Silent Masters*, 233 n. 46. See also Peter Dronke's introduction to his edition of the *Cosmographia* [below, n. 53], 3.

lems posed by twelfth-century poetry, however, a more structural approach seems called for. An appropriate strategy may be to take a closer look at the different genres into which the composition of poetry could ordinarily be divided, namely, the genres of *historia* (history), *argumentum* (argument or analysis) and *fabula* (fable or myth), and survey the distinctions.

In this regard, the role of history in this trichotomy seems to undergo a most interesting development. From his *Commentary on Martianus Capella* it appears that Bernard Silvestris interprets *historia* in accordance with traditional Ciceronian practice as *narratio rei gestae*. The meaning of history, however, which in conformity with ancient tradition served as a rhetorical category, had just now begun to shift to poetry or poetics, where it became regarded as the narration of past deeds; obviously, this narration should not be identified with the 'facts' of history. Poetry could be subdivided even further into satire and tragedy, depending on whether the vices were fought and the virtues lauded, which is the case with satire, or the labors tolerated, which is the case in tragedy. Again, according to Martianus, *argumentum* deals with fictionalized events that could have occurred, like comedy, while *fabula* recounts a narration which is neither true nor truth-like (*verisimilis*).⁴⁶

This tripartite division of poetry mentioned here neatly fits with Bernard's use of the poetic device of *integumentum*, as he distinguished between allegory and integument in the Martianus-commentary attributed to him. In Bernard's Martianus-commentary allegory is a kind of rhetorical figure whereby 'underneath a layer of historical narration (*sub historica narratione*) we find discourse containing true meaning, yet a meaning which is different from the exterior level of discourse'.⁴⁷ This acceptance of double-talk corresponding to double-truth seems typical of biblical allegory, whereas philosophical texts, like the works of Plato and Vergil, utilize the other figure, integument, 'which is discourse which underneath a layer of fabulous narration (*sub fabulosa narratione*) closes or covers true meaning'.⁴⁸ As is

⁴⁶ See Mehtonen, *Old Concepts and New Poetics*, 49–56.

⁴⁷ See Martianus-commentary 2.72–74, in: *The Commentary on Martianus Capella's De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii attributed to Bernardus Silvestris*, ed. by H.J. Westra (Toronto, 1986), 45: *Est autem allegoria oratio sub historica narratione verum et ab exteriori diversum involvens intellectum, ut de lucta Iacob*.

⁴⁸ See Martianus-commentary 2.74–75, in: *The Commentary on Martianus Capella's*

clear from these definitions, the main difference between *historia* on the one hand and *argumentum* or *fabula* on the other lies in the degree to which the expression of true meaning is made contingent upon the accurate representation of reality, which is closely connected to biblical truth. Oddly enough, however, whether biblical stories are true or not is not dictated by reality itself, inasmuch as they correspond with it or not. Rather, the Bible itself serves as the exclusive norm according to which poetic narration can either be categorized as fable or as history.⁴⁹ In the latter case we are dealing with an *auctor*, in the former with a *poeta*. With this the predication of reality has thus become a hermeneutical affair.

Instead of solving a dilemma, as might seem to be the case at first sight, upon closer inspection this theoretical exposition fits in with the emerging picture of twelfth-century ambiguity, as it generates more novel and puzzling problems. For can we truly separate out biblical material so easily from non-biblical texts, given that the canon of twelfth-century intellectualism, filtered as it was through centuries of liberal arts tradition, shows us a literary corpus of mixed breed? Moreover, in light of what I have earlier called the iconoclastic pull of *integumentum*, it seems hardly realistic, if not highly artificial, to separate out allegory and integument in the twelfth century, especially when we already know that Abelard went so far as to call biblical parables *integumenta*. Should we perhaps simply return the favor, therefore, by calling Bernard Silvestris' poetic works 'allegories'? Jon Whitman, in a study devoted to allegory, has indeed treated the *Cosmographia* as an allegory of creation.⁵⁰ And in line with his above-mentioned thesis, Jaeger has called both this work and Alan's *Anticlaudianus* an allegory of the creation of the perfect man.⁵¹ To arrive at the text that this chapter wants to discuss, Bernard's

De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii attributed to Bernardus Silvestris, 45: *Integumentum vero est oratio sub fabulosa narratione verum claudens intellectum, ut de Orpheo*. See Mehtonen, *Old Concepts and New Poetics*, 54.

⁴⁹ For a broader, more contextualized view of medieval historiography, see J. Knappe, 'Historia, Textuality and *Episteme* in the Middle Ages,' in: T.M.S. Lehtonen and P. Mehtonen (eds), *Historia. The Concept and Genres in the Middle Ages* (Helsinki, 2000), 11–27.

⁵⁰ See Jon Whitman, *Allegory. The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge, 1987). Ch. VI is called 'The Allegory of Creation: The *Cosmographia*' (218–60). See also his useful appendix on the history of the term 'allegory' (263–68).

⁵¹ See Jaeger, *Envoy of Angels*, 281.

Mathematicus, could we perhaps call it an allegory as well? Or are we dealing here instead with a rhetorical anti-type of conventional allegory: not the image of the ideal and immortal man, but of mortal man, perhaps even of man in his essential moribund state? After all, the story ends with his express desire to commit suicide. Or are things different still and should we rather see this poem on a more elementary or mundane level as a simple telling of history, or perhaps even as an *exemplum*, a moral individual tale?⁵² All this and more remains to be brought to clarity when we finally arrive at a discussion of Bernard's text.

IV *When Practice Meets Theory: the Case of the Mathematicus*

A. *From Cosmographia to Mathematicus*

Bernard is best known for his 'allegory' of creation, then, the *Cosmographia*. Written in the 1140s, this poem was dedicated to Thierry of Chartres, his former teacher.⁵³ Given his scholarly pedigree and the content of his poetry, Bernard is usually seen as a poet associated with a Chartrian—here used in the chastened, post-Southern meaning of the term—style of thinking, in which a Neoplatonic cosmology of Nature was intimately coupled with a sustained moralizing dynamic of the soul, the soul, that is, of the perfect man. In that sense, the poem falls in neatly with the new educational ideals of the cathedral schools, as has been convincingly argued by Stephen Jaeger. The poem consists of two parts, dealing with the *Megacosmos* and the *Microcosmos* respectively, as perfect creation finds its crowning moment in the birth of a perfect human being. In the *Megacosmos* Bernard starts out by confronting his readers with Nature's complaint to Noys or Providence about the confusion of prime matter,⁵⁴

⁵² This would seem to correspond with Von Moos' emphasis on the important role of *exempla* in the twelfth century, as demonstrated in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury. See P. von Moos, *Geschichte als Topik*, esp. ch. II 'Zur Begriffsgeschichte und Definition', 22–143.

⁵³ For the text of this work, see Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, ed. P. Dronke (Leiden, 1978). See also Dronke's useful introduction, 1–91.

⁵⁴ Like in Alan's *Plaint*, we are faced with a situation in which Nature is found complaining to God here (cf. *queri*, *Megacosmos* I line 3, ed. Dronke, 7). On the role of Nature, see also P. Dronke, *Intellectuals and Poets in Medieval Europe* (Rome,

as she prays that Noys will succeed in making the world more beautiful than it at present actually is. Opposite Providence or Noys we find Silva (*Ne*), a figure derived from Chalcidius' *Timaeus*, who is cast in a dynamic but enigmatic role, as she both resists being shaped by God and yet seems to yearn for it at the same time. Throughout the *Cosmographia* her role is tinged with a touch of evil, which emerges in Bernard as an inherent principle of nature and not as the direct result of a fault or fall. Evil belongs to creation, in other words, as it embodies an endemic cosmic principle. It is neither caused by the wrongly directed will of humans, as the Augustinian tradition opposed by Abelard had claimed, nor a principle deeply foreign to the symmetric harmony of God's creation, as was the view made popular by the Cathar movement.⁵⁵ In the *Microcosmos* we find Noys ready to complete the reformation of the universe with the formation of a human being (*plasmatura hominis*).⁵⁶ With Urania furnishing the soul and Physis shaping the body, Nature's task is to join the two firmly together.⁵⁷ With the formation of humanity completed, the *exornatio mundi* is now completed. And so the story of the *Cosmographia* ends.

Compared to this poem, the *Mathematicus*, whose precise date of origin we do not know,⁵⁸ seems to follow precisely the opposite course. Instead of leading up to the formation of man, his birth a climaxing moment, it ends with the death of man. What is even worse, this death is a self-chosen one. This is a flagrant violation of the entire Christian tradition, which from Augustine's condemnation in the first book of the *City of God* onwards had rejected suicide unequivocally.⁵⁹ Violating the Christian tradition, this poem comes to a vio-

1992), 41–61 (ch. 2: Bernard Silvestris, Natura, and Personification); B. Newman, *God and the Goddesses. Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2003), 55–65.

⁵⁵ See H. Fichtenau, *Heretics and Scholastics in the High Middle Ages, 1000–1200*, transl. by D.A. Kaiser (1992; University Park, 1998), 155–71 ('The Religious Myth: Bogomils and Cathars'). Fichtenau is careful, however, to protect philosophical myth from such dualistic accusations, see 172–96 ('The Philosophical Myth: Platonists').

⁵⁶ See *Cosmographia*, *Microcosmos* IX.8, ed. Dronke, 140.

⁵⁷ See *Cosmographia*, *Microcosmos* XI.1, ed. Dronke, 142.

⁵⁸ The *Mathematicus* is traditionally dated before 1159, that is, a decade or so after the *Cosmographia*, with which it is sometimes found published together. Godman argues in favor of seeing these two pieces as sibling poems, see his 'Ambiguity in the *Mathematicus* of Bernardus Silvestris,' *Studi medievali, serie terza* XXXI, 2 (1990): 583–648, esp. 600–602.

⁵⁹ See Augustine, *City of God* I.17–27, ed. Domhart and Kalb, CCSL 47:18–28.

lent conclusion, as it ends with a man taking his own life. Such an act of violence is all the more abhorrent in light of the fact that human life is the high point of cosmic life according to the Platonic texture of Bernard's Chartrian thought. By displaying this unusual pattern, the *Mathematicus* disrupts the ordinary course of Platonic poetry, which tends to laud harmony, symmetry, and birth rather than death, violence, and destruction. When compared to Bernard's masterpiece, the *Cosmographia*, from the outset the *Mathematicus* represents an act of poetic sacrilege, as the *exornatio mundi* seems to become irreversibly disrupted, in a manner far more dramatic and perverse than the famous tear or rent found in Nature's garment in Alan of Lille's *Plaint*.⁶⁰ The disturbance of cosmic harmony is not just a formal result of humanity's existence as a precondition for its numerous sinful deeds, but by willfully destroying his own life Bernard's protagonist tears the fabric of Platonic thought into such shreds that repair is out of the question. How does the poem get at such an ominous end, and what in retrospect is its plot? Furthermore, how does the poem—if at all—avoid being entirely self-defeating, if not self-annihilating from a literary and doctrinal point of view? For that it is necessary to take a closer look at the precise set-up of the *Mathematicus*.

As his subject-matter for this poem, which is named after its protagonist *Mathematicus*, Bernard has seized on the Fourth Declamation of Pseudo-Quintilian, a piece of forensic oratory popular in the medieval schools, which he has changed and embellished considerably.⁶¹ The story reminds one of the Oedipus-story, as the twelfth century witnessed a classical revival, but the way in which the story line unfolds is altogether different. In the poem an elderly couple who are without children receive a prophecy that they will have a son, a son so brilliant that he will one day be king of Rome. Unfortunately, his brilliance comes at a price, for he will then have to kill his father. In order to escape ineluctable fate, the parents decide that the son will have to be killed, but when the time comes the mother is unable to kill her own son. In an interesting twist the son was given the name *Patricida* or 'father killer' so as to deter him from ever wanting to commit such a grievous deed:

⁶⁰ For a fuller analysis of this tear and its implications for the divine role of Nature, see below ch. 7.II (The Counter-Image of Nature's Tear).

⁶¹ See Godman, *Silent Masters*, 242–44. Godman thinks Quintilian's bathos which

There is a question about his name, but he is to be called Patricida
 His mother orders it with mysterious shrewdness,
 So that the youth may shudder at such an evil deed
 And such violence, brought to mind whenever he heard his own name.⁶²

The son grows up elsewhere, his father being unaware that he has not been killed. Fate as embodied in the stars eventually leads the son back to his parents. For Patricida becomes a military hero who helps to liberate Rome from the Carthaginians, after the old king fails to do so. The old king, who turns out to be his father, feels compelled to abdicate and the new hero now finds himself standing before the senate. At this point the mother learns that it is her son who is being crowned and she and her husband admit to their heinous deed. Father and son then have an encounter and the father seems to acquiesce in his own death, as he is convinced that Fate will finally have its way. But the son does not merely want to execute a script that is written in the stars and grieves:

Under the inexorable law of fate he was to be
 The instrument of his dear father's loss of life and being.
 The killing of his father casts a shadow on his good deeds and praise-worthy acts—
 One single misdeed overshadows many good.
 He could wish he were taken by death, so that, by that very means,
 The end of his life could be of the same hue as its beginning.
 "If I am allowed to mock the stars and the Fates", he says,
 "I will forestall the fate and death of my father."
 Rome, you will see that I am called Patricida, not that I am
 And the name will have a false significance.
 Wherefore is our mind of one piece with the heavenly stars
 If it must bear the grim necessity of harsh Lachesis?
 In vain do we have a share in the divine mind
 If our reason cannot be free from its own necessity.

was focused on a theme of great interest as well as increasing controversy in the twelfth century, namely astrology, challenged Bernard sufficiently to counter this declamation with a poem featuring his own rational esthetics.

⁶² See *Mathematicus*, ed. Stone, lines 107–10, *AHDLM* 63 (1996): 234. See also Godman, 'Ambiguity in the *Mathematicus* of Bernardus Silvestris,' 616–17. As the quoted lines make clear, the name Patricida is deliberately chosen to deter the son from ever committing such a heinous act. It thus represents a moral application of the third form (*ex contrariis*) of the three standard etymological attributions mediated from antiquity through Isidore of Seville to the Middle Ages: *ex causa*; *ex origine*; *ex contrariis*. See on this E. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948; Bern, ¹⁰1984), 53–54, esp. 486–90.

Not for this purpose did God make the elements, nor the fiery stars—
 That man might be subject to them,
 But he gives to man a higher level of pure intelligence
 So that he can confront the evils thrown in his way.”⁶³

He then asks an unspecified favor from the senate, to which they quickly consent, as he is after all the city’s liberator. When he explains that the favor he seeks is the freedom to kill himself, so as not to have to kill his father, the senate tries to withdraw its offer, but to no avail. With a grand gesture and phrased in authoritative words derived from Justinian’s legal codex, Patricida claims his gift from the senate or else he shall abdicate as their king and be left to his own desires. As Peter Dronke in his comment on this poem aptly states: ‘the hero at the close establishes not so much his freedom to commit suicide as, more fundamentally, his freedom to choose.’⁶⁴

B. *Interpreting the Mathematicus*

When interpreting the *Mathematicus*’s story told above, there seem to be two schools of thought. In the view of Peter Dronke, whose interpretation I just quoted, this poem seems to be about the perennial and heroic clash between the freedom of human will on the one hand and the hand of fate or destiny on the other.⁶⁵ For Dronke, the poem is chiefly philosophical or metaphysical in nature. In line with the tradition of Boethius’ *Consolatio*, Bernard’s hero wants to put his actions under his own control. To the extent that he succeeds, to that extent he is out of Fortune’s reach. This aspect of control of self would explain why it is less important to know whether Patricida actually commits suicide or not. The fact that he makes his own choices, irrespective of either the content or the execution of his deeds, sufficiently thwarts Fortune’s plans. Over and against Dronke’s view, three other reputable interpreters have chosen to place this poem firmly in the tradition of twelfth-century school rhetoric, although they do so in rather different ways. For Winthrop Wetherbee, for example, this poem reflects Chartrian confidence in the possibilities of rhetoric, while Peter von Moos sees it as an organic

⁶³ See Bernard Silvestris, *Mathematicus*, ed. Stone, lines 629–646, *AHDLM* 63 (1996): 266–268.

⁶⁴ See P. Dronke, *Fabula. Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden, 1974), 137.

⁶⁵ It is significant that Dronke discusses this poem in a chapter entitled ‘Fables of Destiny’, see *Fabula*, 119–43.

part of the school tradition of didactic poetry.⁶⁶ In more complex fashion, Peter Godman, in an exhaustive article devoted to the *Mathematicus*, elaborates on the role of the poem as a rhetorical exercise. Rather than seeing it as an exercise in the conventional sense of an exemplary case-study, Godman moves the poem's main argument to a meta-level, as for him Bernard's main concern is with the impact and outreach of poetry as such. Thus Bernard composed the *Mathematicus* ultimately, Godman holds, to be able to reflect through the fate of his self-styled and artificial protagonist in a selected piece of forensic oratory about the nature of the real intellectual contribution made by rhetoric itself.⁶⁷ Yet he does so in a most complicated way, as it seems that before all he wants to avoid closure, as he ponders on the possibilities and restrictions of rhetoric in an age of medieval enlightenment. Carried out in the style of a rhetorical parody, the *Mathematicus* does not hesitate to parody in fact the very device of parody itself. Central to its plot is not control by the stars, free will *versus* determinism of the astral or divine kind, although such matters do play a role in the poem's margin, but the ambiguous use of language by Bernard's various heroes all striving for virtue.⁶⁸ Instigated by the etymology of the boy's name, the parents and Patricida himself set in motion a cascade of well-meaning but false steps, bringing them to the point where actual meaning can no longer be determined, as the entire plot turns out to be mired in paradoxes. As a true *opera aperta*, with Godman borrowing Umberto Eco's famous hermeneutical term here,⁶⁹ the *Mathematicus* thus attempts to open up and explore the concept of ambiguity, regarding it as the most important contribution that poetry can make to the art of philosophical speculation in the twelfth century.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ See Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century. The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres*, 153–58. See also P. von Moos, *Geschichte als Topik. Das rhetorische Exemplum von der Antike zur Neuzeit und die historiae in 'Policraticus' Johannis von Salisbury*, 278.

⁶⁷ See his 'Ambiguity in the *Mathematicus* of Bernardus Silvestris', 638–648.

⁶⁸ See e.g. the etymology of Patricida's name which was given as a deterrent for patricide in line 107 (*nomen in ambiguo*) and is turned into an overt lie in lines 637–38 (*Roma patricidam dici non esse uidebis | Et mendax sensus nominis huius erit*). See above nn. 62 and 63.

⁶⁹ See 'Ambiguity in the *Mathematicus* of Bernard Silvestris,' 641–42.

⁷⁰ See U. Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. A. Cancogni (Cambridge, 1989), 1–24. See esp. 21: 'We have, therefore, seen that (1) open works, insofar as they are *in movement*, are characterized by the invitation to make the work together with the author and that (2) on a wider level (as a subgenus in the *species* 'work in movement') there exist works which, though organically completed, are "open" to a continuous gen-

What is striking in Godman's analysis, which stands out from the others and has been reworked in his recent study *The Silent Masters*,⁷¹ is that it neither builds on nor conforms to the poetic theory as distilled by intellectual historians from twelfth-century texts. For him it is clear that, while Bernard may well make use of this theory, he tries at the same time to reach beyond it. This feat can be adduced here to mark precisely the unique accomplishment of Bernard's text: it is a composition with transcends standard poetic categories, including his own handbook definitions. As a result, the conclusion seems warranted that one can only do justice to Bernard's true poetic accomplishment by emphasizing his striking originality. Whatever one's preferred interpretation—and there is ample reason to suspect that there are multiple options in interpreting the poem—it should be true to the philosophical openness and ambiguity Bernard values.

Stepping back from the *Mathematicus* for a moment, Christine Ratkowitsch has taken an approach not unlike Godman's in her recent study on the *Cosmographia*. Transgressing Bernard's distinction between allegory and *integumentum* found in his commentary on Martianus Capella, she considers Bernard's *Cosmographia* a twelfth-century theodicy, an attempt to explain the presence of evil without accepting the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, but without falling into a kind of Manichaean dualism either.⁷² If this kind of creative interpretation, quite apart from the issue of its correct application, can be extended to serve as a legitimate historical strategy, going back to Bernard's or anybody else's theory of poetics will no longer suffice to interpret twelfth-century works of poetry. By the same token, one might say that, if we want to find out twelfth-century attitudes about suicide, the right strategy is not simply to go back to a twelfth-century poem about suicide. Bernard's didactic poem belongs in the classroom and does not thereby lend us any further insights into the agony that goes into the act of killing oneself.

As a first conclusion, then, we ought to state that the connection between twelfth-century poetic theory and poetic practice is more

eration of internal relations which the addressee must uncover and select in his act of perceiving the totality of incoming stimuli'. The latter definition would seem to apply to Bernard Silvestris.

⁷¹ See Godman, *Silent Masters*, 228–93 (ch. VII, The Open Work).

⁷² See Chr. Ratkowitsch, *Die Cosmographia des Bernardus Silvestris. Eine Theodizee* (Cologne, 1995), 121–32, esp. p. 128. Especially on the point of the creation of man and his inherent deficiencies Ratkowitsch seems more negative than both Stock [cf. *Myth and Science*] and Dronke [cf. *Fabula*].

complicated than has often been assumed, as there does not appear to be a linear connection between them.⁷³ In the same way, there does not appear to be a linear connection between discussing suicide in a poem and the moral ethos of the self who contemplates suicide. This observation should not be taken to mean that from the absence of a linear connection one must henceforth conclude to the absence of any relation at all. How should we deal with Bernard's poem, then, and what is its message? More especially, what is the meaning of its 'suicidal' plot when set against the background of the various developments in twelfth-century poetry? In the following I shall come back to my reflections at the beginning of this chapter about poetry's para-scholastic function and the ideal of 'paradise-under-construction' as expressed in the poetic handling of allegory and *integumentum* in the twelfth century.

V. *The Art of Ambiguity: Suicide and the Suspense of Judgment*

In Ratkowitsch's interpretation of the *Cosmographia*, it appears that her main reason for seeing this work as a theodicy lies in the fact that in Bernard's poem God has delegated his creative responsibilities to Nature. Nature in turn employs Noys and Silva, who further down the hierarchy of powers hires Urania and Physis. The importance of these various degrees of separation in the poem, so Ratkowitsch's line of reasoning seems to be, is that they shield God from bearing direct responsibility for human evil, while this same mediation allows him to retain creative control, again without falling into a kind of Manichaean trap. At the same time, however, Ratkowitsch rightly stresses that through Bernard's adoption of this structure of a mediated hierarchy the possibility of reconnecting with God always lingers, as one of the poem's *motifs* in good Platonic fashion is precisely that of return or *reditus*. In this respect, Bernard's poem can be fully integrated with the tradition of the return to paradise, as the poem's driving force seems to be humanity's latent desire to reunite with God.⁷⁴

At this point I would be inclined to go one step further than Ratkowitsch does, not—as one might perhaps expect—by arguing

⁷³ Godman points to the 'multiple indeterminacy' which the poem generates, see 'Ambiguity in the *Mathematicus* of Bernard Silvestris,' 640.

⁷⁴ See Ratkowitsch, *Die Cosmographia des Bernardus Silvestris*, 121–32.

that the poem is both, a theodicy as well as an attempt at cosmic restoration, but by saying that it is ultimately neither. For Bernard, after all, it is not God who stands in need of defense. Neither is it humanity's explicit desire to leave this world and be mystically united to God. As indicated above in chapter one, Bernard's vision of return is instead one in which Adam is well aware of his brief Adamic stay in paradise and yet is capable, when necessary or pressed upon, of imagining how it would be to live there permanently. In other words, the point of the poem is to afford humanity the explicit possibility of imagining the return through the act of reading, as Bernard unleashed his imagination through the act of composing it, rather than to actually complete the return.

This change, however subtle it may seem, represents a much larger and ultimately subversive shift, namely the shift from paradise as a fixed point of return to paradise functioning as an open-ended literary horizon. Distinguishing this new horizon is the idea that literature, but especially poetry—in contradistinction to the fixed categories of scholastic rhetoric—has gained the freedom to use various devices instead of being defined by them, to project its own ambiguous vision instead of executing a set of pre-ordained rules. In retrospect, this view challenges the theodicy-interpretation of the *Cosmographia* just as much as it does the gnostic/hermeticist reading of emanation over creation. Its subversive quality lies precisely in the fact that it defies compartmentalization of any kind. Thus we see Bernard move with ease from the *Timaeus* to the *Asclepius* and back to *Genesis*' account of creation without ever committing firmly, let alone exclusively, to one of these sources. None of the aforementioned models, therefore, however useful they all are, can be expected fully to do justice to the richness of the poem's vision. Their failure is not due to any perceived lack of clarity, but is rather caused by a surplus of poetic energy.⁷⁵ As a result of this energy the poem is able to send us mixed messages in fact, which a schematic interpretive model tends to overlook, as cosmological, anthropological, ethical, theological, and philosophical aspects are all found jumbled together.

⁷⁵ This surplus of poetic energy is aptly brought out by Dronke's comment that 'the *Cosmographia*, in sum, is an effortlessly literate achievement, bringing numerous elements of ancient and medieval thought into a new poetic harmony.' See *Cosmographia*, ed. P. Dronke, Introduction, 30.

The question now arises how we should interpret the ambiguity of the *Mathematicus*? Are we indeed confronted here with a classroom piece of dramatic oratory, and is the freedom of vision expressed here simply coextensive with the artistic freedom of the author? Or is there a serious discussion of Stoic determinism *versus* Christian free will according to philosophical categories, conventional or more experimental ones perhaps, in line with its didactic set-up? More importantly, what does it mean when in this case we reply again that the answer, like before, is that it is neither?

At this point I would like to dwell once more on the idea of ambiguity as a functional art in twelfth-century Chartrian poetry, one which sets itself the task of exploring, rather than settling issues of meaning. Beside the case of Bernard, one may also think here of Alan of Lille's *Plaint of Nature* and his *Anticlaudianus*, as important specimens of this same art. What all these poems have in common is that they consider Nature, God, and humanity as jointly constituting the harmony of the universe, a harmony traditionally reflected in the so-called *concordantia artium*. Yet somehow this harmony has been disrupted, as a result of which blame is going around in circular motions. As it is unclear, on the whole, where evil begins or where it ends, there begins to emerge a coincidence of rhetorical and metaphysical ambiguity that only adds to the confusion, a confusion that can only be remedied with the help of rhetorical acuity. An aspect that should be mentioned now as adding a further shade of color to Bernard's exploration of ambiguity in his *Mathematicus*, one which may well be considered a stroke of his particular genius, is his strategy to apply the suspense of judgment as an explicit poetic act.⁷⁶ As it happens, the point on which he withholds rather than bestows judgment in the *Mathematicus* is a particularly challenging and sensitive one, as it involves the issue of suicide. Thus the utmost rhetorical dexterity is called for.

Inside the general context of poetry as a particularly valuable twelfth-century vehicle for exploring meaning and testing intellectual

⁷⁶ Although I follow Godman to some extent in wishing to concentrate on rhetorical ambiguity, I see Bernard's exploration of the theme of suicide at the same time as an attempt to push even this notion of ambiguity to the extreme, regarding it still as a problem even while embracing it as a solution. This corresponds with my other point, namely that twelfth-century humanism as an increasingly 'para-scholastic' project accepting the provisional and perspectival nature of all knowledge is not aiming for clarity in the scholastic sense, as advocated by Southern.

boundaries, suicide seems to be a problem of special interest. Whereas from the perspective of orthodoxy this issue had received adequate treatment by Abelard in q. 155 of his *Sic et Non*,⁷⁷ as a problem of natural science it presented a new case of determinism *versus* free will, allowing one to incorporate the direct consequence of new developments in astrology. From this perspective one can understand why Dronke saw the case of Patricida in these terms. As we saw in William of Conches and others, however, the sheer problem of cosmic determinism had already been adequately answered by pointing to the intermediate status of *natura operans*. Where ambiguity seemed to become a problem of increasing weight and relevance, however, was in the context of synchronizing cosmological and literary interpretation. As William's works try to show, there are many parallels between literary and cosmological interpretation, even though he elaborates mostly inside the latter genre, leaving still room to answer the literary questions more fully. Given Bernard's overall predilection for the ambiguity typical of the poetic sense, suicide may well have seemed a particularly interesting topic to explore. While death embodies finality and judgment, suicide seems to forestall such finality, forcing us somehow to contend with the suspense of meaning. Moreover, from the inscrutability of the victim's motives, it follows that not just the *auctor* or *poeta*, but also the reader is left free to draw his own conclusions. Be that as it may, one still needs to confront the question of why an author would prefer to go down this road. Here again we are faced with the larger metaphysical questions, which Godman perhaps too easily rejects, after Dronke had presented them too romantically.

In my own view, a view which is embedded in the idea of twelfth-century poetry as the act of constructing paradise, thereby opening the door to ever greater stories of human success, ambiguity becomes important precisely because it is the perfect vehicle for tragedy. While tragedy in the classical sense involves the valid confrontation of simultaneously plausible yet opposed human scenarios resulting in ineluctable clash, in twelfth-century poetry, colored as it is by notions of Christian salvation, this is no longer a viable option. On the other hand, while early medieval metaphysics allowed the universe's cosmic carrousel

⁷⁷ See Abelard, *Sic et Non*, q. 155: *Quod liceat homini inferre sibi manu aliquibus de causis et contra*, ed. McKeon, 518–522.

to go around without ever blaming or praising human beings univocally, as is still the case in the *Cosmographia* and the *Plaint of Nature*, the emergence of the 'paradise under construction'-ideal shifts the emphasis from the divine creator to the human *auctor* or *poeta*, with the latter becoming not just more acclaimed but also more vulnerable as the designated architect of restoration. It is typical of twelfth-century tragedy that with the possibility of success, not only can human authors come forth to claim this success more directly than before, as Abelard did, but they must at the same time be ready to face its inevitable alternative, i.e., the specter of failure. Consequently, it is increasingly important that there be an adequate rhetorical outlet for this sense of failure, allowing humans to become reconciled to themselves as well as to their fate, encompassing the entire sweep of human chances and failures.

While salvation through Christ provided the doctrinal answer to questions of faith, in the twelfth century this answer no longer seems to suffice as remedy to personal grief. Or rather, more in line perhaps with developing notions of penance in the twelfth century, subscribing to this article of faith no longer guarantees that one thereby immediately absorbs or appropriates its supreme rationale, as Anselm was still able to do in his *Cur Deus Homo*. In the same way, the act of cosmic interpretation, while on the one hand providing a relevant forum for debate on the impact of sin on the harmony of the universe, no longer allows one simply to bypass the carrousel of blame through the process of cosmic make-over. With the ideal of 'paradise under construction' sinking in, a more explicit and more sophisticated art of mediation seems to be needed to settle issues of personal guilt and grief as well as to reconcile the idealized scope of envisaged human success with the all-too-human and many-sided experience of failure. This failure can involve surface issues like the reality of broken dreams, sudden lapses in moral judgment, and unrequited love, but it can also, as seems to be the particular case in Bernard Silvestris, address the deeper underlying awareness of cosmic disenchantment coupled with the experience of human finitude. In fact, one of the difficulties of twelfth-century poetry relating to the broader paradigm-shift that appears to be underway is that it becomes increasingly difficult to isolate single-issue problems.

As an example we may return to Abelard's collection of *planctus*, which seem to represent isolated emblems of biblical history. On a larger scale, however, these laments are exemplary, inasmuch as they

are all dealing with human grief as a result of loss through death. In the context of the discussion on suicide, the fourth of his laments on Samson is especially intriguing. While the figure of Samson is one of the few biblical figures to have committed suicide, he is also one of the Old Testament heroes whose sacrifice of self was theologically embraced as foreshadowing Christ's act of redemption. Skirting a theological clarity that he deems misleading, Abelard's powerful poem projects a deliberate image of ambiguity by opening as follows:

Truly a great abyss
are your judgments, God.⁷⁸
to be feared the more,
the more they are mysteries,
the more that, faced with them,
All other strengths are weak!⁷⁹

It is the hiddenness of judgments, irrespective of whether they are the Christian God's or the stars', which calls upon the poet—here as much as elsewhere—to use his utmost discretion for fear he might misinterpret them. The existence of such a discretionary abyss alerts him, in other words, to the implied need for an ethics of interpretation, one in which the problems of 'integumental' assertiveness, of failed cosmic harmony, alongside the nascent yet faltering awareness of self can be explained without being entirely solved. To assign a meaningful place to this endemic and lasting sense of ambiguity, without trying to foreclose it in conventional tropological, Neoplatonic, or scholastic categories, that is the real moral problem of the *Mathematicus*.

It is significant that in Abelard's *Plaint* on Samson the hiddenness of God's judgment allows for an increase of fear which can in the end only be allayed by his personal embrace of God's will. This moment has arrived when Samson crushes the temple and kills himself, thereby killing his enemies as well. Ironically, this moment of

⁷⁸ See also the use of this quotation (Ps. 35:7 Vg.) in his *Ethics*, ed. Luscombe, 64 line 23 (*Scito te ipsum* I.44.4, ed. Ilgner, CCCM 190: 43). The gist of Abelard's arguments there is that God's ways are indeed mysterious, as he can reject even those who offer themselves to him and accept those who do not seem eager to be saved or worthy.

⁷⁹ For the full text of this *planctus*, see P. Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages. New Departures in Poetry 1000–1150* (Oxford, 1970), 121–23.

a self-chosen and self-inflicted death is precisely the point where Samson's self-sacrifice, despite all his well-known and wrongful motives such as his crushed pride and his lust for the vengeful Delilah,⁸⁰ appears ultimately to coincide with Christ's redemptive act. After all, do they not both act in obedience to God and for the good of their people? This same desire to embrace God's will has led Abelard elsewhere to a more explicit personal identification with Christ, as for all his display of self-will he remarkably ended the *Historia calamitatum* with the words of the Lord's prayer: Thy will be done! (*Fiat voluntas tua!*)⁸¹

Switching from Abelard to Bernard, we can amply demonstrate the messianic aspects of Patricida's case. Bernard's poem depicts him as a true liberator of the people. In form, appearance, and conduct, moreover, he proves himself a born leader, albeit a pagan one. Yet in line with his program of exploring ambiguity, Bernard leaves more questions unanswered than Abelard. Instead of resigning himself to God's will, as was Abelard's simultaneously Christian and Stoic approach, all we can legitimately conclude about Patricida is that in the end he takes life into his own hands. To become his own man, he insists not just on proclaiming his freedom but truly claims it, saving his father's life even when rejecting his public office. If necessary, so the end of the poem seems to imply, he is ready to do so unto death.

As Patricida tells the Roman people:

But since the honors you have bestowed pay the rewards
 Your king for that reason will cease to be his own man
 Forthwith I lay down the king's robe, forthwith I divest your king
 Free and unentangled, I am ready to follow my own resolve
 (*Liber et explicitus ad mea uota meus*).⁸²

Compared to Abelard's portrayal of Samson, however, whose self-inflicted death in line with traditional theology displays a touch of

⁸⁰ Both Abelard's lament on Samson and Bernard's *Mathematicus* reveal an ambiguous attitude to misogyny. Complementing Dronke's (Dronke, *Poetic Individuality*, 135–45) and Godman's (*Silent Masters*, 245–55) remarks in this regard, I think their misogyny reflects to some extent conventional patterns of tropological exegesis which their poetic handling subverts rather than condones or confirms. Godman rightly stresses the continuity between *fortuna* and *femina* in Bernard's poem.

⁸¹ See Abelard, *Historia calamitatum*, ed. Monfrin (Paris, ²1962), lines 1603–09. See also the end of chapter 5 above, p. 213 n. 62.

⁸² See Bernard Silvestris, *Mathematicus*, ed. Stone, lines 850–55, *AHDLM* 63 (1996): 280.

revenge (*hostium et propria miscet dolor funera*) and of murder,⁸³ Bernard remains singularly concentrated on the ethics of interpretation. Professional poet that he is—rather than logician and theologian, or romantic poet, for that matter—, for him, unlike for Abelard, Patricida's freedom can only be gleaned from as well as gained by the poet's act of actually closing his book. As Wetherbee has first demonstrated, the final sentence is a deliberate pun on the *explicit liber* that commonly marks the end of a medieval text.⁸⁴ While this may seem like a sacrifice of authorship, I rather see it as a symbol of moral affirmation underscoring the authority of authorship that arises from the mire of paradoxes. In line with his carefully maintained ethics of interpretation, Bernard's addition of a signature *explicit liber* allows the author of this universal poem ultimately to 'own up' to being the true architect and creator of the poem's universe as well.

By accepting the role of author-*cum*-creator Bernard is able to shake off prior constraints and inaugurate a new poetic era. It seems that upon the ending of the book Bernard's hero does not only gain freedom, but is only now given life. With his suicide functioning poetically as a kind of resurrection, the task of interpretation—in the chastened sense of discovering meaning and affording identity—can truly begin.⁸⁵ In consequence, the door to the realm of interpretation, including both the reading and the writing of poetry, is swung wide open, as the making of new paradises can now get under way.

⁸³ According to Augustine, *City of God*, I.20, CCSL 47:22–23, suicide is ultimately a transgression of the sixth commandment: Thou shalt not kill. Augustine's position (*Neque enim qui se occidit, aliud quam hominem occidit*) is quoted in Abelard's *Sic et Non*, q. 155: *Quod liceat homini inferre sibi manus aliquibus de causis et contra*, ed. McKeon, 518–522 at 518.

⁸⁴ See Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, 157.

⁸⁵ On the role of the reader as a delegate of the author in this regard, see the concluding chapter on Alan, ch. 7.VII (The Fixity of Fiction).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: FROM ADAM'S FALL TO NATURE'S TEAR AND BEYOND: PARADISE AND ITS DISCONTENT

I *Paradise as Emblem*

From the start I intended this book to be a study about paradise. But what does 'paradise' mean? What is more, what do I mean by it, that is, why did I choose this topic at all? The place of paradise in this project—this much should be clear, now that we have reached the endpoint—was never one to coincide with any particular geographical location. Neither have I been particularly interested in finding the venue that has become idealized as the so-called *locus amoenus*, because it supposedly was the spot where Adam and Eve once lived. The greater the lapse of time since they left this site, the more idealized this site tended to become, at least so it seems. There are many studies devoted to this localized notion of paradise or its utopian equivalent,¹ and no doubt many more will follow, as the quest for happiness remains an ever intriguing one for human beings, even if such happiness is belated and generally of a highly stylized literary quality.

What has interested me instead is to seize on paradise as an image of sorts, or better still, to use an oft-misconstrued contemporary term, to see paradise as an icon. By 'icon' I do not mean to evoke any in-your-face kind of visualization of early delights as if representing a kind of medieval spa, even if only an imaginary one. What I had in mind was rather the opposite, as I see the role of the icon primarily as that of a medium, one that exerts a magnetic attraction precisely because it has a certain pictorial stillness about it. Transferred to the line of argument set out in this book, I have tried to use the term 'paradise' consistently to refer to the quiet, more or less hidden ideal that somehow kept the disparate texts of the early medieval

¹ See J. Delumeau, *History of Paradise. The Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*. See also P. Neville-Sington and David Sington, *Paradise Dreamed. How Utopian Thinkers Have Changed the Modern World* (London, 1993).

tradition together. It did so—at least so this book has wanted to argue—by supplying them not only with sufficient focus but lending them above all a clear sense of purpose. Hence, early medieval masters were despite their use of a variety of texts and genres for a long time able to convey a coherent and meaningful message. It even seemed as if the disciplines of grammar, rhetoric and theology could become mixed beyond recognition, that is, beyond the recognition of later interpreters. The latter point is especially important here, because it brings up the matter of historiographical perspective, to which issue I shall come back later on.

Perhaps because the precise content of this message was never entirely clear, however, it could also happen that somewhere along the way it vanished, getting lost without leaving a trace. At least, so it seems. For with the death of these early medieval masters—and many of them were indeed famous in their own day—their message was doomed to fall into oblivion, spread out as it was over a variety of texts, which were unconnected by theme or by principle. Although they could perhaps be seen to share ‘something’, from the changed perspective of later developments it proved difficult to state what this ‘something’ concretely entailed. Seeing paradise as an ‘icon’, or better still as an ‘emblem’, appeared to have the distinct advantage of giving us a more direct way of accessing these disparate texts. By viewing them in the same way as one looks at a medieval illumination, we were able to lend them a kind of unity not visible before. In one glance an entire universe or world view—one that has since been irretrievably lost—was suddenly captured at a glance.

Using the pictorialized emblem not just as a way of shedding light on these texts but also as a comment on them,² in a following step the use of the term ‘paradise’ was extended to serve as a kind of hermeneutical key. This key proved indispensable in helping us to unlock this hidden world so as to reveal its collection of masterful treasures to ‘outside’ observers, not just their scholastic successors but also postmodern readers like ourselves. By using one and the

² I have been inspired to make a connection with the visual arts by M. Camille, *The Gothic Idol. Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge, 1989). Camille sees the thirteenth century as the age where representation becomes independent of its creator. As he states poignantly on p. 47: ‘If in theory God was the auctor of all, in practice Gothic artisans began to infringe His copyright’. A similar transition seems to take place in late twelfth-century poetry.

same emblematic image, we are simultaneously presenting a bird's eye-view of an entire culture—something that was impossible to come by before—and thereby given a tool to analyze it. Thus we are made to see how this lost world differed in scope and horizon from the one that followed it. By that I refer to the intellectual world of the thirteenth century, in which theology and the arts, philosophy and literature, all came to stake out separate domains, giving the whole of its educational enterprise the outlook of a carefully structured mosaic. As the contrast between these two competing visions makes clear, however, somehow the preceding world view, though less refined and sophisticated in many ways, possessed an abundance of evocative power and dynamic strength.³

It is tempting to explain the difference by seeing the early world view as more spontaneous and less complex. Yet if there is one thing which this book has tried to demonstrate, it was that this was not necessarily the case. In this respect it is important to state here emphatically that I did not want to imply that the early medieval intellectual enterprise, even though it clearly radiates a more organic quality, was thereby any less polished or artificial compared to later cultural developments.⁴ What I do want to claim is that later developments, such as the analyses contained in the works of scholastic theology, cannot fully escape the conclusion that they are more explicitly 'man-made'. By comparison, it appears as if early medieval intellectual culture could rally so much energy as to project a unique world view presenting us with a cosmic horizon which is at once broken and unbroken. This leaves undisputed the fact that it will always remain hard to define its precise intellectual essence, as it presents and represents an elusive whole of reason and affection, imagination and analysis. Furthermore, besides projecting a world view that is broken and unbroken at the same time, early medieval intellectual culture harbors the promise that underlying it is an unin-

³ The link between the visual arts, among which sculpture and architecture, and the learning of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is also explored in Ch.M. Radding and W.W. Clark, *Medieval Architecture, Medieval Learning. Builders and Masters in the Age of Romanesque and Gothic* (New Haven, 1992).

⁴ See on this M.B. Pranger, *The Artificiality of Christianity. Essays on the Poetics of Monasticism* (Stanford, 2003), 97–190 (Part II: Density). As Pranger makes clear, Anselm was no less rational than any of the scholastic thinkers in the thirteenth century, but the difference between them consists in the fact that his rationality coincides with a kind of monastic poetics.

terruted chain which connects God's creation inseparably to the goal of human happiness. Captured in a single emblematic image, the appeal of this early medieval culture can be summarized by the promise that once we are able to move beyond its horizon, we will enter the outskirts of paradise.

II *The Counter-Image of Nature's Tear*

Another way of putting all this—and this is in fact how I originally conceived this study—is to say that early medieval texts have a certain 'theologizing' quality about them, as they seem to circle loosely but consistently around the same themes of God, humanity, and the universe. Whether the actual universe they describe is a cosmos tightly bound by the demands of justice, as Anselm of Canterbury had it, or one that breathes the ambience of infinity evoked by Eriugena's *natura*, appears to matter less than the fact that the early medieval universe was somehow all-encompassing. In both cases it is clear beyond a doubt that God is fully integrated with the universe. The upshot of such a holistic cosmology is that it cannot fail to be deeply theological in the traditional post-scholastic sense, but is never exclusively so, which accounts for my use of the term 'theologizing' to describe the intellectual enterprise of the period. The 'theologizing' aspect points precisely to the unique inclusive nature of early medieval culture, as it comprises the reality of divine absence and human grief alongside a deep sense of divine presence.

Since God is fully incorporated in this universe, there seems to be no explicit need to single out his transcendence or his providence, or any other of his attributes for that matter. Although the early medieval attention for a more implicit presentation of divine power should for that reason not be construed as detracting from his supremacy, it may yet be of help to explain why the issue of divine supremacy is not presented in terms of an emphasis on his infinity. This question seems especially relevant, as this will increasingly be the situation in the scholastic era. Rather than underscoring the distance between the divine and the human, in this earlier age his supremacy seems to afford him instead a unique way of communicating and mediating his governance and providence through the nooks and crannies of the entire created world. The richness of creation's recesses was somehow considered much better expressed by

seeing them as veiling God's presence rather than unveiling it through overtly revealing the divine. God may be transcendent as well and in good Platonic fashion he surely is immaterial, but he is before all an immanent presence in the early medieval cosmos. This makes him despite his supremacy in fact part and parcel of the same natural cloth of which human beings, animals, and all the fine organisms of physical nature are made. Hence, we can begin to understand why it is that a certain theological aura colors all early medieval cosmological and anthropological reflections, thereby having the inevitable effect of heightening the stakes of the business of interpretation considerably.

To put the matter differently, we can say that early medieval texts are holistic in a unique way, as their inclusiveness does not just involve their intimidating scope and unbroken horizon, but also their texture. After all, this texture reflects the pliability of a multivalent reality, a reality which paradoxically also represents the breakdown of the unbroken whole from which it stems. This sense of a multivalent reality reflective of an unbroken and a broken whole at the same time allows the authors to engage in a remarkable hermeneutics of proliferation, as the use of one image can through a process of association and contamination easily give rise to another.⁵ Hence these texts do not yet display the syncopated structure that would soon come to characterize the texts written in the milieu of the schools, thereby becoming such a notable feature of scholastic thought and, if one follows the theory of Richard Southern's *Scholastic Humanism*, of all academic texts in its aftermath.⁶ Instead they reveal a much more organic structure. The difference between the early medieval universe and the universe of scholasticism can perhaps be interpreted best as that between a world view woven out of whole cloth and that of a mosaic artfully constructed from individual pieces. The latter may well present us with a more appealing overall vision which, since it is well-constructed and the product of careful design, seems less vulnerable to break up as a consequence of inherent architec-

⁵ This coincides with what Godman has called the 'multiple indeterminacy' generated by Bernard's *Mathematicus*. See P. Godman, 'Ambiguity in the *Mathematicus* of Bernardus Silvestris,' *Studi medievali, serie terza* XXXI, 2 (1990): 640.

⁶ Southern holds that the clarity of scholastic humanism, through the rules of intellectual behavior which it had put into effect, effectively lasted until the twentieth century, see R.W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*. Volume I: Foundations (Oxford, 1995), 13.

tural flaws. Yet the difficulty with the mosaic view is that despite all its clarity it is in the final analysis hard to find any connection between the resulting vision and the original design according to which the individual pieces are ordered and laid out. In contrast, the whole cloth out of which the early medieval world view is woven serves as a guarantee that the entire universe ultimately hinges on a single and tangible pattern. Moreover, this pattern is consistently transmitted by and revealed in the many texts that describe, analyze and interpret it, however diverse they may be.

Still, what appears to be its strength may well be its greatest sign of weakness at the same time. The fragility of seeing the universe as an organic entity is demonstrated most powerfully by what I hold to be the counter-image to the emblem of paradise, namely the image of the tear in Lady Nature's garment found described in Alan's *Plaint of Nature*.⁷ Let us see how the poet has outfitted Lady Nature:

A linen tunic, with pictures from the embroider's art, concealed the maiden's body beneath its folds. This tunic, bestarred with many a color, gathered into folds to make the material heavier, sought to approximate the element, earth. On the first section of this garment, man, divesting himself of the indolence of self-indulgence, tried to run a straight course through the secrets of the heavens with reason as charioteer. In this section the tunic had suffered a rending of its parts and showed the effects of injuries and insults. In the other sections, however, the parts had sustained no injury from division or discord in the beautiful harmony of their unbroken surface. In these a kind of magic picture made land animals come alive.⁸

This image of the rent garment here seems to represent a kind of early medieval rendition of Adam's fall. Instead of Adam and Eve hiding their nakedness in paradise by covering themselves,⁹ thereby

⁷ My emphasis here is clearly on the rent garment as a composite emblem of what is wrong with the cosmos and humanity. Concentrating on a different, directly evocative notion of picture, Mary Carruthers has recently commented on the mnemotechnic of picture, or *Bildeinsatz*, for which Alan's depiction of Nature to open his *Plaint* serves as a memorable example. See her *The Craft of Thought. Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge, 1998), 196–198.

⁸ See Alan, *De planctu naturae* II 230–38, ed. N.M. Häring, *Studi medievali* 3a serie 19 (1978): 817; transl. J.J. Sheridan, *Alan of Lille. The Plaint of Nature. Translation and Commentary* (Toronto, 1980), 98–99. Note how Alan's description of man here anticipates Prudence's journey in the *Anticlaudianus* as Nature undertakes the creation of a New Man.

⁹ See Genesis 3:7.

forever associating clothing with guilt and shame, here Nature's natural clothing is presumably torn apart by human hands, thus adding a further dimension to humanity's sinfulness, namely that of the destruction of nature's own balance. Yet whatever the precise background of this image, it is a most powerful and telling one especially in terms of its effect, as we see how through the fact of a single seam becoming unstitched, the entire universe begins to unravel. Thus the image of the rent garment poses a direct threat indeed to the whole cloth from which the early medieval world view appears to have been woven.¹⁰

This process of cosmic disintegration does not just bring on tears on the face of Lady Nature, as she proves inconsolable ever since, but it especially results in making the position of the human poet an ever more complex and compromising one. Here we hit on what I see as one of the most significant intellectual phenomena in the development of twelfth-century intellectual culture, i.e., the fact that problems affecting the interface between cosmology and anthropology result in an increasingly complex poetics, or rather, a poetology. After all, the poet in the poem both reflects Alan's own role as a poet and doubles it at the same time, as he is able to comment on his poetry in the very process of writing it, allowing the reader to make his own creative connections as well.

But let us first concentrate on the poet inside the poem, or better, inside the narrational plot of Alan's prosimetric work.¹¹ As I have tried to make clear from the start, the poet in Alan's *Plaint* plays a dual role, as he is Nature's confidant inasmuch as she needs consolation, and her helper inasmuch as she needs an ally to defend herself against even more sexual abuse. Reading the poem carefully, however, and in line with the budding complexity of twelfth-century poetology, we cannot fail to notice how—more surreptitiously and

¹⁰ See Alan, *De planctu naturae* II, 196–98, ed. Häring, 816; trans. Sheridan, 94: 'Muslin, with its white color faded to green, which the maiden, as she herself later explained, had woven without seams, was not cheapened by common material but was gay with delicate workmanship. It served the purpose of a mantle'.

¹¹ See P. Dronke, *Verse with Prose. From Petronius to Dante. The Art and Scope of the Mixed Form*. (Cambridge, MA, 1994). On pp. 46–47 Dronke discusses the tensions in Alan's prosimetric work by pointing to the complex relationship between Nature and Venus. To this one should add the specific tension in Alan—as different from Bernard Silvestris—between the poet in the narrative and the poet authoring, and hence outside, the narrative.

obliquely perhaps—he gradually seems to take on the role of her potential adversary as well. At the same time, however, it remains true that only the poet in his capacity as the author of the *De planctu*, can bring salvation in Alan's view, as he needs to bring his poem to an acceptable close. As a result, the resonance of the well-known image of the poet's lyre undergoes a remarkable change in the twelfth century. It is no longer simply about entertaining us, affording us an indirect kind of self-knowledge in the form of myth and fiction that, however seductive, can yet be redirected as edification.¹² Instead, it increasingly starts to sound off-key altogether, its disharmony producing ever more cosmic disarray, even while gaining in philosophical truth. What is even more threatening, it thereby eventually seems to set us on the road to death rather than life.

Still, as he is not just the embodiment of humanity's ultimate fate inside the *Plaint* but also as its author in control of it, the poet's responsibility clearly reaches much further than merely thwarting imminent danger by lulling us to sleep with sweet sounds from the lyre. Dealing humanity a devastating blow through the use of a most simple but efficacious image, that of the rent dress, Alan seems to maneuver the poet into a position from which he can hardly recover. He makes clear how the tear in Nature's garment is precisely shown where a human figure should have been visible. This torn image raises not only the question of humanity's own sinful actions and their devastating effects—how and why did mankind misbehave?—but it also discloses what can only be diagnosed as an inherent flaw in the creator's underlying cosmic design, a flaw which the poet must bare and redress all at the same time.¹³

At this point it is necessary to devote a special paragraph to the disastrous effects of human sin, as its deepest origin is found ironically intertwined with humanity's innate capacity for infinite glory. For that we have to take yet another look at the early medieval universe, inspecting it more closely and in more detail. Characteristic

¹² This is the gist of Chenu's treatment of Alan's poetry, which he analyzes under the rubric of the symbolist mentality. See M.-D. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century. Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, transl. J. Taylor and L.K. Little (Chicago, 1968), 99–119.

¹³ The flaw in the creator's cosmic design refers to the weakness that led Lady Nature to delegate her responsibilities of overseeing creation to Venus. This episode, which was also discussed in ch. 2 above, is told by Alan in *De planctu* VIII, 199–276.

of the Platonic world view as it was transmitted to the early medieval period is that the universe is organized according to what could be called a dovetail pattern. This pattern helps to explain how the highest One in Platonic fashion is found integrated with the created many though various interlocking steps and hierarchical gradations. There are links and intermediates to be observed everywhere, so that from every angle the highest God and the lowest matter can somehow be seen to connect, even if they are nowhere linked directly. On the other hand, the natural flow of this vertical hierarchy—not just downward but also upward again, hence ultimately completing a circular though not thereby repetitive motion¹⁴—derives its energy from the fact that the entire universe hinges on a supposed interrelation of micro- and macrocosmic representation undergirding it. As an effect the cosmic beauty of the universe becomes uniquely enhanced, as it can now be observed mirrored in the microcosm of human nature. Thus a two-way dynamic is set in motion. Just as the human person has a soul or intellect, so the cosmos has a World Soul, with one analogy leading us to another, from the universe to humanity and vice versa. One is tempted to embark on a veritable quest to find ever more analogies and parallels, not just tracing them but also creating them, as the implicit circularity of *exitus* and *reditus* gradually gains poetic luster. From a mere reflective description of the unique historical sequence of creation, it starts to display a conceptual status and meaning of its own. The reverse is also true, however, as it appears that early medieval rational thinking becomes more and more dynamic, to the extent that its intellectual analyses begin to resonate more and more with the supposed rhythm of cosmic design.

The growing complexity and residual synergy of this pattern of interlocking analogies explains to a large extent why the twelfth century saw such a rising interest in the *Timaeus*. William of Conches and others were clearly fascinated by its mixture of imagination and rational analysis, which must have considerably enhanced its attraction. The interrelation of macro- and microcosm substantially increased the esthetic value of the entire universe, as it now bore the stamp of a majestic edifice of near-divine proportions. As if producing its

¹⁴ Christian Neoplatonism on the whole distinguishes itself by completing this circular motion only once, with repetition leading to heretical *apokatastasis*.

own counter-effect, however, the existence of such a many-faceted concept of the universe forced the literary author at the same time to achieve and maintain an acceptable and manageable balance. The common way to do so was to reveal that there was a built-in structural weakness inherent in this beautiful universe as well. Revelation of this structural flaw had as but one of its side effects that it slowly but surely began to eat away at the evocative strength of the projected cosmic vision that I have come to regard as the age's chief cultural monument. At the same time we begin to notice how as another of its side effects it detracts from the power of the intellectual thought system producing such a complex vision. Since human nature is considered endowed with free will as just one of the fine creaturely qualities flowing forth from its status as *imago dei*, the question became pressingly urgent of how it could keep its will in check, preventing further derailment beyond the immediate consequences of its fall. Complicating this question even further was the preceding problem of how human authors could ever hope to extricate themselves from a universe that seemed flawed by design.

Linked to the interest in the *Timaeus*, which combines a cosmological and an esthetical quality connecting fable and myth, it is perhaps not surprising that we find a growing interest in ethical questions as well in the twelfth century, as is revealed most explicitly in the thought of Peter Abelard. This interest is not just related to the erosion of intellectual values generally uncontested before, as the unity of action and understanding is inherent in most Platonic cosmology, but it also corresponds with the jarring side effects of the cosmic dissonance produced by the poetic lyre. Despite its subtitle pointing to the prime relevance of self-knowledge in ethical questions, Abelard's *Ethics* may well be more 'objective' than has sometimes be thought, inasmuch as its seminal quality is due at least in part to the fact that it accords perfectly with the intellectual pulse of the times. And although the ethical system Abelard designed clearly departs from conventional penitential codes, which were predominantly monastic, there is a sense of cosmic urgency even as we find him emphasizing intentionality and individual responsibility. Given that a cosmic way to settle humanity's debts seemed increasingly impossible, finding a personal manner of reconciling humanity's scorn for God may well have been the best available option for Abelard. Viewed in this way, his *Ethics* shows much more affinity with Anselm's incarnation theory in *Cur Deus Homo* than an overly nuanced observation of detailed

discrepancies separating their respective incarnation theories would have us believe.

The latter approach, i.e., a detailed theological comparison between Anselm's 'objective' and Abelard's 'subjective' incarnation theory, which is conventional in many theological handbooks, may just be too dependent on the existence of an anachronistic scholastic and doctrinal framework to serve the historical interpretation of texts from the early medieval period adequately.¹⁵ In a similar way it appears Abelard's *planctus* are much more than a surface appreciation of them as near-autobiographical poetic outcries can bring out. Presenting his readers with a kind of biblical counter-lamentation, these *planctus* pretend to offer salvation to both their author and their readers not as an outward emotional result of the lament but implicit with the very process of reading their text. Rather than separating the subjective from the objective, Abelard seems to collapse them in favor of a greater efficacy of the literary text as text. If we disobey chronological order to engage in an interpretation of Abelard informed by Alan's imagery, it is as if by focusing on the tragic morality of biblical figures Abelard's laments somehow try to make amends for the human wrongdoing implied by Alan's tear in Nature's garment.¹⁶

All this combined leads me to the following tentative conclusion. Far from pointing unilaterally into the direction of humanity's sinful nature alone, the observation of the tear in Nature's garment as an inherent flaw in the universe's cosmic design can perhaps also be seen as sowing the seeds for a solution to the problem of human—and cosmic—sin. Given the close connection between God, humanity, and the universe, the process of guilt by association is most receptive to remedy if one can intellectually reverse the process of decay and disintegration. Overlaying flawed creation with a protective veil of creative poetry, that is, engaging in the process of cre-

¹⁵ In my opinion Evans' discussion of the various twelfth-century theories of incarnation is an example of too scholastic an approach to the problem of the New Man. See G.R. Evans, *Alan of Lille: The Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1983), 133–65. A similar problem underlies the thorough study of Abelard's incarnation by R.E. Weingart, *The Logic of Divine Love. A Critical Analysis of the Soteriology of Peter Abelard* (Oxford, 1970). See esp. pp. 201–06.

¹⁶ See also my reflections on Abelard and the self in W. Otten, 'The Bible and the Self in Medieval Autobiography: Otloh of St. Emmeram (1010–1070) and Peter Abelard (1079–1142),' in: D.E. Aune and J. McCarthy (eds), *The Whole and Divided Self. The Bible and Theological Anthropology* (New York, 1997), 138–46.

ating poems that contain sufficient openness and ambiguity, can do just that. It is clear from the above observations that the eventual solution to the problem of human sin, preventing an effect of total disintegration, must be found on the interface of anthropology and poetics. In what precisely the early medieval solution to human sinfulness ultimately consists will be explored next.

III *The Dynamic of the Return*

What the peculiarly apt emblem of the tear in Lady Nature's so powerfully demonstrates is that the fall of humanity is not primarily a historical turning-point, one behind which unfortunately there is no turning back for us, but a deeper, structural flaw indeed. As such it cannot fail to raise doubts about the texture of the whole cloth from which the universe is woven. For one might legitimately ask the question whether this flaw is not inherent in the very concept of creation, even though it did not manifest itself at its earliest origin. From there the question arises whether this flaw ultimately does not cross the frontiers of creation altogether, reverting back to the creative activity of God himself. What Alan's emblematic tear reveals to us is that as a direct consequence of the early medieval world view human sin can unravel the entire 'archi-textural' design of the cosmos, leaving us wondering what the entire point of creation, including its literary representation, ultimately was. This adds a new dimension to the poet's responsibility, making him the arbiter of destruction and salvation. For wonder and astonishment can eventually degenerate into boredom and despair, representing a kind of circular motion whose nature is so repetitive that escape seems no longer possible. Yet somehow—and here we come close to why I selected the 'return to paradise' as a structural motto for the age—this situation of an inescapable *taedium* is prudently avoided. Notwithstanding the fact that a tendency towards melancholy underlies many twelfth-century texts as a rather powerful and droning pulsating force, for all its slow moving and its near endless meandering the early medieval mindset showed little sign of a repetitive strain injury. The question then arising is why not?

The chief reason may well lie in the fact that the alluring and enduring promise of a return sufficed to provide even the slow pace of the universe's unfolding with considerable energy. What is significant

about the early medieval universe is not just that it was made out of whole cloth, but that that cloth reflected a deep underlying longing, a yearning desire for the return, whose eagerness matched the same zest for life noticeable at the world's beginning. What the goal behind the world's creation was or what this return precisely entailed or implied, remains difficult to assess. Naturally, in good Platonic and Neoplatonic fashion, it appears that the return that was envisaged was a return to God. But what exactly does that mean in the twelfth century and in this kind of para-scholastic literature? The return to God, the so-called *reditus* or *aditus* seemed increasingly to be a code word for a kind of restoration of a pristine integrity, one that was apparently and irretrievably lost. *Reditus* indicates a return to time before the fall, perhaps to timelessness itself, to a universe not yet torn asunder by sin, sickness and finitude. As an intensified form of the so-called general return, a kind of universal apokatastasis, however, it seemed that via a special return humanity could aspire to a particularly privileged state that transcended any awareness that sin, sickness, and finitude are here to stay.

In many ways it appears most odd that the early medieval texts which we have studied in this book are typified by such profound longing. Most of them are texts that are simple *qua* structure. Furthermore, they are generally didactic *qua* purpose. Compared to the degree of technical complexity found in scholastic arguments, they seem to breathe an air of innocence bordering on the naïve. But here we may well have run up against the authors' precise accomplishments, for innocent is in my view exactly what they are not. If there is one reason why I have labeled them with the paradise-emblem to begin with, it was to try and explain why such texts can be strikingly simple on the analytical level while being utterly sophisticated and profound on another. After all, the main goal driving their composition and underlying their message was to facilitate the unleashing of the human imagination.

By focusing on the return to paradise I have tried to emphasize their profundity by showing how it manifested itself powerfully and succinctly in a clear sense of purpose. Having shown how a sort of goal-orientedness permeated the world of these early medieval texts, we can decide to approach them as forming part of a much larger enterprise to which they make a contribution without exhausting the goal itself. In a next step we can try to explain why it is that, despite the *taedium* their view of the universe seems to radiate, they tended

not to evoke it in their readers. Similarly, we are made to see that, despite the circularity that seems to be their usual pattern, they were bound to a certain trajectory that they subconsciously followed. Somehow the readers of these early medieval texts were all put on their way, moving slowly but inexorably forward on the road towards paradise.

Thus the overriding vision projected by these early medieval texts is that they reveal a strong and collective sense of being 'underway', thereby avoiding stagnation. This has a subtle effect on their illumination-like character as I have tried to describe it earlier. For in addition to offering us a bird's eye-view of the universe, comparable to the functions of the decorations on Lady Nature's mantle, they have the simultaneous effect of offering us a bird's eye-view of the intellectual culture of the age, one in which the early medieval period is seen as actively developing, processing and negotiating change rather than merely undergoing it.

IV *Early Medieval Standstill versus Late Medieval Development*

What then is the concrete historiographical effect of the above observations, which collectively state that early medieval texts are developing rather than merely being affected by outward change? Let me illustrate my point by giving two recent examples of modern assessments of (early) medieval intellectual culture. The first is taken from the recent study on medieval mysticism *The Darkness of God*, published by Denys Turner in 1995.¹⁷ In it Turner gives an interesting survey of Christian mysticism, ranging from Augustine through John of the Cross, as he traces the slow development of an intellectual niche where mysticism and the apophatic strand of medieval thought meet. The first part of Turner's book, which stretches roughly from the Bible through Bonaventure, is called 'Two Sources and a Synthesis'. The second part is called 'Developments', taking us from Eckhart through John of the Cross.¹⁸ While it is unfair perhaps to criticize Turner's book for a lack of historiographical awareness as the author

¹⁷ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God. Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge, 1995).

¹⁸ See Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 11–134 (Part I) and 137–237 (Part II).

clearly states that he is no historian, it is nevertheless telling that he brings up the theme of 'developments' only after Eckhart comes on the scene, a clear forerunner of modernity.

When we go back from the second part on 'Developments' to the first, the question arises of what or who his two sources are in the book's first part. They derive from the Greek and the Hebrew views of creation, which Turner presents as a contrast if not quite a contradiction, namely the opposition between *allegory* and *exodus*.¹⁹ Turner elaborates on this underlying contrast by tying it in with the further differences in approach to Christian mysticism advocated by Augustine and Dionysius the Areopagite respectively. Thus he separates between the interior, experiential view on the one hand,²⁰ and the dialectical Greek-Neoplatonic worldview on the other, whereby the latter is typically characterized by the complementary methods of kataphatic or affirmative and apophatic or negative theology. If we follow Turner's argument in the first part of his book, it somehow seems as if the early medieval period in between Augustine (to whom I add Dionysius here) and Bonaventure consists in—or rather, disintegrates into—a series of interludes or momentary standstills. Apparently, the sequence that these intellectual interludes present does not qualify as a development. When comparing the early medieval intellectual atmosphere to the later Middle Ages, it appears as if the former can only be presented through old-fashioned slides, forming a hotchpotch of static fragments without telling a noticeable story of their own. Only in the later Middle Ages do we get enough momentum to show a synchronized movie, one that presents us with a plot of its own.

With his insistence on the profound dichotomy between *allegory* and *exodus*, Turner highlights a familiar tension. Having been briefly overcome in the culture of the Bible and early Christianity, it flares up again as this cultural balance soon becomes fractured. This time it flows out into the dialectic of the kataphatic and the apophatic

¹⁹ See Turner, *Darkness of God*, 11–18.

²⁰ See Turner, *Darkness of God*, 50–73. In its conventional insistence on Augustine's inwardness Turner's analysis essentially echoes that of another recent treatment of the *Confessions*, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989), 127–42. For a view that places Augustine more in the tradition of kataphatic theology, see W. Otten, 'In the Shadow of the Divine: Negative Theology and Negative Anthropology in Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena,' *The Heythrop Journal* 40 (1999): 438–55, esp. 444–46.

method that is visible in the contrast between the cosmic dynamic of Dionysius' liturgical symbolism on the one hand and the internal energy of Augustine's spiritual quest on the other. Turner actually takes up a theme here that was first made prominent by the French theologian Marie-Dominique Chenu in his *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century. Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, an English rendition of the original and more complete *La théologie au douzième siècle*.²¹ In his study Chenu points out how the twelfth century witnesses the coming together of various forms of Platonism, thereby allowing Christian thinkers to overcome the dichotomy between 'Semitic religion and Hellenistic intellectualism, between the gospel and Greek naturalism, by a convinced determination to integrate them'.²² In contradistinction to Turner, Chenu focused on the Neoplatonism of Augustine and that of Boethius, into which he saw that of Pseudo-Dionysius injected in the twelfth century. His view of the twelfth century becomes even more complex, inasmuch he distinguishes the more naturalist atmosphere of the various twelfth-century Platonisms from the development of a symbolist mentality and the role of allegory. Although due to his mastery of a kind of pointillist technique the picture painted by Chenu is substantially more nuanced than Turner's, and the way in which he unravels the twelfth-century intellectual mentality a major achievement, Chenu's study likewise succumbs to the pressure of extrinsic schematization. Here as in Turner this extrinsic schematization is again rooted in a conception of Christian culture as that of a mosaic consisting in elements of Greek naturalism and the gospel. It is as if pre-twelfth-century intellectual development can only be traced by dissolving it into different configurations of the various ingredients that are seen as making up a series of successive mindsets. This may help to explain Chenu's remarkably tense attitude toward twelfth-century poetry. His is an attitude that does not just echo the surface hostility found in twelfth-century texts about the poet's lyre, but seems ultimately driven by an unarticulated scholastic bias, as despite the author's

²¹ Cf. n. 12 above. This study was originally published as *La théologie au douzième siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 1957).

²² See Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society*, 94. In focusing on the intended goal of harmony rather than on the generation of ambiguity, Chenu's treatment betrays a touch of the scholastic here.

literary sensibility he steadily privileges the theological over the language of theologizing.²³

My second example is of a literary rather than a theological origin. It concerns the recent study by James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry*.²⁴ The aim of Simpson's book is to unite two late medieval poems that convey scientific 'information' by seeing them as diverging specimens of *Bildungsroman*. Both these poems, while being more literary than scientific in form, are highly sophisticated and nuanced due to the fact that they contain encyclopedic knowledge that would later be channeled through separate scientific media. Information in the Middle Ages, so Simpson argues, did not mean information in our modern sense but had much closer and organic ties with the concept of creation. Hence, 'inform'-ation and cosmology went hand in hand, whether it be the cosmology of divine creation with God at the helm or the cosmology of literary creation with the poet as artisan and the psychological hierarchy of self unfolding in close correspondence with the hierarchy of being. Simpson's focus is on two poems, namely Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus* and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, which he considers anchored in two different traditions of literary humanism. They go back to Plato and Vergil, for Alan's hierarchical and intellectual view of the self, and to Aristotle, for Gower's more imaginative vision, which I will here leave out. Both poets have in mind to produce a philosopher-king and an ideal ruler, but both also want to 'inform' the reader's self, in the sense of civilizing and educating him in accordance with the ideals set forth in their poems.²⁵

Although I shall go into Simpson's argument more in depth below, I want to emphasize here how his study differs from Turner's and Chenu's by putting forth a more structural contrast between the different types of western humanism. At the end of his book he links

²³ As an example we can look to the following comment in Chenu, *Nature, Man and Society*, 141: 'The complacent satisfaction with which Bernard Sylvester, Alan of Lille, or Chrétien of Troyes personified natural forces, virtues, ideas, or sciences did not derive only from their imitation of antiquity, where allegory was rampant from Prudentius to Boethius; it derived also from their personal taste, even if that taste proved distinctly lacking when it came to adding new values to the ancient stereotypes'.

²⁴ The book's full title is James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry. Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio amantis* (Cambridge, 1995).

²⁵ See Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, 1–21.

this opposition not so much to their different sources, but rather to the different prophecies these authors project in their respective works. Thus Alan's optimism, which is directed at his young king, is in sharp contrast with Gower's pessimism, as the latter reveals an overwhelming awareness that the educational project in which his ruling is implicated may just fail. The question whether or not it will actually fail is less important than the fact that Simpson's acceptance of the diversity of Alan's and Gower's views allows for a tension which seems altogether less artificial and more realistic than the stylized and schematized views held by both Turner and Chenu. To put it differently, with a steadfast eye on paradise as the central theme of this study, Simpson's view is more accommodating to the slow metamorphosis that I judge to be typical of early medieval intellectual development. Inherent in the *longue durée* is the sense of a seeming standstill, even though it may very well be that there is none in reality, and Simpson clearly attempts to demonstrate this about his chosen medieval texts. In the above I have tried to show the illusion of such a standstill by playing up the subtle tension between searching for paradise, while losing hold of it at the same time. Thus the image of paradise could embody the dear memory of a world that was tragically lost as well as become the new goal to which one aspired.

Changing Simpson's terminology somewhat, one could indeed say perhaps that early medieval thinking was duly 'inform'-ed by paradise. This is true epistemologically, insofar as the desire for paradise shaped its cosmology, and morally, insofar as it guided the period's intellectual program. Indeed, as we have seen, various authors strove to negotiate their own balance between transmitting the cosmological tradition, facing the imposition of ecclesiastical constraints or foregoing these through proactive self-censorship, and integrating new ideas each in their own way. In concluding that early medieval thinking was 'informed' by paradise, however, we affirm that the reach of this statement ultimately transcends the various individual knots and strata just mentioned, as the image of paradise calls on its readers first and foremost to capture the age's creative genius in its entirety. Thus it allows us to make visible what had remained invisible for a long time about the intellectual and esthetic integrity of early medieval thought, as it was overshadowed by the flamboyant theological talent of the Church Fathers and outshone by the disciplinary constraints imposed by the scholastic system.

V *Paradise and Its Twelfth-Century Discontent*

In the previous chapter I have tried to make clear how the role of paradise gradually changed from representing a memory, not necessarily of ‘things past’ but a memory nonetheless, to a constructive ideal, more precisely, to the idea of an ideal world to be constructed. From broadly ‘informing’ early medieval thought, so to speak, paradise became more and more an image actively shaping it, as the emphasis shifted from cosmology to cosmography, from *mimesis* to *poiesis*.²⁶ Whereas the twelfth century is widely known for the scholastic separation between theology and philosophy, I have wanted to see the authors and texts studied in this book instead as representatives of a broad medieval humanist tradition. In doing so, however, I am concerned at the same time to draw attention to a new and equally important separation, as this age saw the beginning of a new and growing dichotomy between theology and literature. The seeds for this dichotomy had perhaps always been lodged in the tradition of Christianity, as the possibility of their actualization depended not just on the degree of available talent but also—perhaps even more so—on the degree of creativity required for the building of theological constructs. For all its reputed static qualities, the intellectual culture of the early Middle Ages remained strikingly vibrant to the precise degree that it was able to collapse the role of the divine author more or less imperceptibly into that of the human author.

John the Scot’s *Periphyseon*—to come back to my seminal example one last time—offers us a *tour d’horizon* of the entire cosmos on a scale not seen before or after in the early Middle Ages, even when he did so in his typical but highly idiosyncratic patchwork style. Yet we should not forget that his work also represents a terrific *tour de force*, not just of an intellectual or philosophical nature as he embodies a kind of medieval idealism,²⁷ but before all of a highly literary kind. From accurately describing and analyzing the universe he slowly

²⁶ On *poiesis*, see above chapter 1.VII (The End of Chartrian Humanism).

²⁷ See D. Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena. A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), 81–102. See also W. Otten, ‘Realized Eschatology or Philosophical Idealism: The Case of Eriugena’s “Periphyseon”’, in: J.A. Artsen and M. Pickavé (eds), *Ende und Vollendung. Eschatologische Perspektiven im Mittelalter* (Berlin/New York, 2002), 373–87.

but surely maneuvers himself more and more in the position of its supreme architect. Or perhaps, he always was its intellectual author, as his opening words of the *Periphyseon*: *Saepe mihi cogitanti* . . . may actually be taken to indicate. If so, then the beautiful prayer near the end of book V proves to be as much a eulogy of his own literary accomplishment as an invocation of the presence of Christ, with the two having become fused indistinguishably in the ideal of perfect *contemplatio*:

O Lord Jesus, no other reward, no other beatitude, no other joy do I seek from you than that I come to a pure understanding—without any error of deceptive *theoria*—of your words, which have been inspired by Your Holy Spirit. This is the *summa* of my felicity, the end of perfect contemplation, because beyond that the rational soul shall find nothing, for there is nothing beyond that.²⁸

If we connect the *summa felicitatis meae* of the end of Eriugena's *Periphyseon* here with the *humanae salutis summa* at the opening of Abelard's *Theologia 'Scholarium'*,²⁹ then the latter work may just appear to be more literary than has often been thought. For underneath its technical theological nature we are invited to admire its author's 'masterful' literary play with scholastic categories, just as underneath Eriugena's mystical prayer we are invited to inspect the crafted technique of intimacy applied by a Carolingian schoolmaster. Perhaps the literary rather than scholastic nature of Abelard's works can also be gauged from the problems he apparently faced when finishing his works. These problems were not primarily caused by philosophical difficulties, as these would only have fascinated him and brought out the intellectual detective in him even more. Rather, they are of a highly artistic and literary nature, as even his more scholastic 'Theologies' involved composition and, indeed, careful construction in the deeper sense of literary creation and evocation.³⁰

Skilled use of literary technique generally involves the intellectual mastery of the material one is presenting. In the case of remembering paradise, however, precisely the temptation to demonstrate

²⁸ See Johannes Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* V, 1010 B–C, ed. Jeuneau, CCCM 165: 210.

²⁹ See on this passage, ch. 4, p. 160 n. 57 above.

³⁰ This is brought out in Constant J. Mews' article, 'On Dating the Works of Peter Abelard,' *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 52 (1985): 73–134, repr. in C.J. Mews, *Abelard and His Legacy* (Aldershot, 2001).

one's growing intellectual mastery with adequate skill and dexterity may have had a counterproductive effect, to the extent that it increasingly seems to impose itself by coloring the texts of the period. As a result a notable shift is brought about in the scope and meaning of paradise, as the constructed and constructive aspects become emphasized over the preservation of its qualities as a memorial of sorts. As a result the literary styling of paradise distances itself not only from the theological but also from the historical. From an open-ended literary memorial with manifold ramifications paradise turns more and more into the statuesque and the monumental, complying with the prescriptive demands of the new disciplines. Rather than a place lying just behind the horizon, paradise becomes a miniature frozen in the distance, as separated from ordinary intellectual thought as a work of art from its artisan. Not surprisingly, given the cultivation of the role of the author as *artifex*, one who had grown apart from God as 'natural' Maker, moreover, this monumental notion of paradise becomes especially elaborated in poetic texts, ranging from Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia* to Alan of Lille's *Plaint of Nature* and his *Anticlaudianus*. In fact, the notion of paradise as a poetic monument would stretch far beyond, to Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* and, finally, to Dante's *Paradiso* as its medieval culmination-point.³¹

Thus the discontent with cosmology which I see emerging in the twelfth century does not just represent a decline but at the same time a new birth, as I have tried to point out in the preceding chapter, namely the birth of paradise as a constructive ideal. This is what I have called the ideal of paradise-under-construction. No longer hemmed in by the constraints of reality, this ideal seems to be put forth with an enormous degree of elaborateness and subtlety, as philosophical ambiguity becomes increasingly wrapped up, if not at times altogether buried under a surplus of literary self-expressiveness. The puzzling confusion that results can perhaps be approached best by referencing the role of the New Man in Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*. In conformity with my contention in the first chapter,³² I hold that Alan's New Man is not so much a new Christ, as Gillian Evans has tried to prove, but rather an *alter Adam*, a New Adam. Although it

³¹ Simpson recommends that the ties between the *Anticlaudianus* and Dante's *Paradiso* be reexamined as yet another *desideratum* in the study of medieval humanism, see Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, 16–17.

³² See above chapter 1.VII (The End of Twelfth-Century Humanism).

is true that the world lies at his feet, it is at the same time true that he is locked up in his master's world, as a spider in its web, insofar as his obedience to his literary maker cuts short the conversation with his original Maker.

Let me end this book with a brief analysis of the *Anticlaudianus* as a work that rounds off the earlier tradition of paradise as 'mémorial mentale', thereby instituting a new tradition of paradise as a literary construct and a place of utopian longing.

VI *The Anticlaudianus and the New Poetics of Paradise*

There has been a longstanding debate about the dating of Alan's *Plactus* vis-à-vis his *Anticlaudianus*. Wrapped up in this debate, as if it involved a kind of *integumentum*, was the question about the relationship between the two poems. Does the *Anticlaudianus* form a sequel to the *Plaint* or are they merely two versions of the same theme?³³ Before we enter this debate, I would like to state by way of preamble how in light of my central thesis about the transition from paradise to paradigm, this question goes much deeper than the search for actual historical reasons for its composition can possibly reveal. The trouble with poetry, so to speak, is that somehow the end product of a polished poem is cut off from its incubating process, as it takes on a life of its own. Located in the sphere of twelfth-century poetry, Alan's poems clearly form their own universe. At the same time, however, inspired and restrained as this poetry is by its author's careful choice for an 'integumental' format, twelfth-century poetry reveals an 'artificial' character that is of a precisely crafted but at the same time peculiarly unique dialectical nature.

In Bernard Silvestris' *Mathematicus*, this poetic dialectic expresses itself first and foremost in the poem's elaboration of a fundamentally ambiguous attitude with respect to the possibility of free human action. On the one hand, this ambiguity seems to reflect the openness of a world that can still veer back to assume its original paradisaical proportions, including its innocence. And indeed it does strive to do so. On the other hand, as we also saw in Bernard Silvestris,

³³ This naturally is a question of interest to Simpson as well, see *Sciences and the Self*, 17, 180–85 (on the *Genius* figure).

this ambiguity poses at the same time—and most likely deliberately so—as a criticism of any facile optimism that may become apparent in the age. As such it taps into deeper, underlying questions about the possibility of endless intellectual progress along the scientific fault-lines of the twelfth century.³⁴ It thereby brings us back to the question of paradise in a new and altogether more troubling way. For the problem that affects the quest for paradise is now found intertwined with another and larger problem of twelfth-century poe-tology, as it mediates between memory and melancholy. If somewhere in the twelfth century we find the poetic balance tipped indeed in the direction of constructing rather than remembering paradise, the ‘loss of memory’ that results from this leads us inevitably from melancholy to tragedy. Yet the tragedy with which we are confronted is not just the tragedy of personal death, not even the death of biblical persons lamented by Abelard, but much more encompassing and subversive, as the analysis of the *Mathematicus* sufficiently shows, the tragedy of the death of an ideal.

Oddly enough, however,—and here we are confronted with the concentrated dialectic that is typical of poetry—death does not always manifest itself in disintegration, dissolution or even disappointment, but can follow quite the opposite course, namely that of creation and birth. This tendency is noticeable in Alan’s *Anticlaudianus*. Adjusting the parameters of the conventional scholarly debate about twelfth-century poetry to reflect this observation, I propose to inspect the *Anticlaudianus* here in close correspondence with the *Mathematicus*,³⁵ rather than as sequel to or restatement of the *Plactus*, whose dynamic in my opinion it clearly reverses.

Seeing the *Anticlaudianus* as a reversal of the *Plaint* ties in much better overall with the former work’s conception of paradise as a final goal to be achieved rather than a place of natural origin. Whereas in the *Plaint* Lady Nature descends from heaven, in the *Anticlaudianus* she commands Phronesis to ascend to heaven, with the ideal of paradise now literally veering outside the orbit and moving

³⁴ See on the scientific debates in the twelfth century especially A. Speer, *Die entdeckte Natur. Untersuchungen zu Begründungsversuchen einer ‘scientia naturalis’ im 12. Jahrhundert* (Leiden, 1995), 1–17, 289–306.

³⁵ Some historical evidence can be found in the fact that according to Godman some early thirteenth-century poetic anthologies combined these two texts of experimental narrative poetry. See Godman, ‘Ambiguity in the *Mathematicus*’, 602.

into outer space never to return as a concept embodying achievable reality. If I am allowed to exercise my own poetic judgment for a moment, somehow the *Anticlaudianus* does indeed make the impression of presenting us with fiction rather than reality. This same character of the *Anticlaudianus* as a fictional product speaks also from its prose introduction. There we find how the ambiguity inherent in earlier poems like the *Mathematicus* is replaced by the construct of a fixed multi-layeredness, one whose freedom is only seemingly free as we are forced to choose from among a set of pre-selected options:

For in this work the sweetness of the literal sense will soothe the ears of the boys, the moral instruction will inspire the mind on the road to perfection, the sharper subtlety of the allegory will whet the advanced intellect.³⁶

While nothing is hidden and various readings are possible, the favorite reading of choice, as Raoul de Longchamps made already clear immediately upon the poem's appearance, was not to see the New Man as the Christ of Christian history. But this began to change in fourteenth-century monastic circles.³⁷ With the mechanical application of an orthodox reading increasingly seen as the self-evident truth, the certainty of salvation begins to encroach upon the alluring appeal of paradise only to replace it in the end altogether. But this certainty could only be achieved at a price. It was realized at the cost of poetic ambiguity, an ambiguity which had been necessary not just to fuel the imagination but also to lend the poet the much needed insight into the complexity of his own age.

VII *The Fixity of Fiction: the Poetic Archi-Texture of the New Man*

And so the alluring appeal of paradise as a lingering memory is gradually replaced by the construction of paradise as a new home. Or rather, paradise now poses as home for a new man, embodying a recreated humanity rather than a restored one. This means that

³⁶ See Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, ed. Bossuat, Prose Prologue, 56; trans. Sheridan, 40–41.

³⁷ For various Christological readings of the *Anticlaudianus*, see Chr. Meier, 'Die Rezeption des Anticlaudianus Alans von Lille in Textkommentierung und Illustration,' in: Chr. Meier and U. Ruberg (ed.), *Text und Bild: Aspekte des Zusammenwirkens zweier Künste in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1980), 408–549.

paradise inevitably loses some of its dialectical and potentially iconoclastic force, as it ceases to serve as a cultural undercurrent and productive counter-ideal. At the same time, however, it seems that it thereby gains in attraction in terms of tapping into the literary aspirations of those masters involved in the schools and the ideals of scholastic education.

The dialectical quality that made paradise such a productive force of memory before getting lost in the above manner can perhaps best be circumscribed as the fertile tension between divine and human authorship. Instead of an ongoing conversation between mutually committed partners, we begin to notice how the artistic competition between the Creator of the universe and the creator of poetic paradise is more and more solved in the interest of the latter. As a result God moves more and more to the background, with Nature increasingly taking over his role. At the same time, the voice of the human poet seems to be entirely removed from the poem's plot, to the point where it is barely audible in the prose instruction at the beginning of Alan's work. Yet despite all the multiple choice answers we there find him laying out before his readership, the concentrated dynamic inherent in the complacent melancholy displayed on Lady Nature's face, which so characterizes the *Plaint*, is simply no longer there. Instead, the complex but intimate relationship between Nature and the human poet that existed in the *Plaint* is effectively replaced by the collegial but sternly hierarchical leadership of Nature, as she has herself accompanied by a group of personified subdeities among whom we find Reason, Prudence, Faith and Theology. The fact that these deputies refer to human attributes and virtues and include the science of theology, which in scholasticism comes out increasingly as a discipline engaging in human rather than divine conversation, is passed over without further ado. By embodying the ideals of human education these deputies and disciplines are all awarded a new lease on life, one that will last for centuries, if we accept the plausible educational aspects of Southern's hypothesis about the organization of European universities. This poem, Stephen Jaeger adequately concludes about the *Anticlaudianus*, is about spreading and promoting the *cultus virtutum*, the new morals appropriate for the new man.³⁸ Here we find a proper foreshadowing indeed of those men who will be educated at distinguished European universities for centuries.

³⁸ See Jaeger, *Envy of Angels*, 284–91.

All this might seem to flow naturally from the characteristics typically known about the twelfth-century renaissance. We clearly recognize all its familiar traits, such as the faith in education, the flourishing of the schools with their hosts of ambitious masters, the lingering ideals of courtly love, the interest in poetry of a mannerist kind. All these aspects help us better to understand and appreciate the various ingredients that go into the composite picture of the New Man. Yet the abundant scholarly appreciation for this kind of literature, ranging from Johan Huizinga through Chenu to Barbara Newman who all seem to recognize an alternative for the aridity of clerical scholasticism here,³⁹ obfuscates and thwarts the much-needed effort to understand it as a contemporary comment on the things that became lost.

The fallacy caused by modern insights into medieval texts becomes evident when we realize how scholars like Chenu and Louis Dupré became so entranced by the sacramental symbolism of the age as to misread the famous poem by Alan of Lille as a clear-cut commentary on the beauty of creation:

<i>Omnis mundi creatura,</i>	The whole created world,
<i>quasi liber et pictura</i>	Like a book and a picture,
<i>nobis est in speculum.</i>	Serves us as a mirror.

Yet the mirror that is mentioned at the end of the verse is ultimately the mirror of human death, reflecting a deeply literary quality through its biblical and monastic resonance,⁴⁰ even when resonating with the natural rhythm of created life, a rhythm in which life's beauty can mask death. Insofar as Alan intended this mirror to yield accurate human self-knowledge, it is clear that in his view only death's inescapable certainty has the ability to make it do so.

And yet, I would maintain that underneath the persistent melancholy and criticism of the age, an aspect of memory still lingers in the poetic literature, as in my view the ties with the earlier paradise tradition are never completely severed, even if they have become

³⁹ On Huizinga, see above *Understanding Medieval Humanism*, p. 3 n. 2 and ch. 6, p. 217 n. 5. For Dupré's position, see *Passage to Modernity. An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven and London, 1994), 35. Cf. also chapter 2, pp. 56–59. For Newman's position, see *God and the Goddesses. Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2003), 291–327 (ch. 7: Goddesses and the One God). The text of Alan's entire poem is found in the appendix to chapter 2.

⁴⁰ One might think here of the monastic tradition of *contemptus mundi*.

deeply transformed indeed. Perhaps the very success of this transformation is one of the reasons why Alan's poem was so immensely popular upon its publication. After all, it made undeniably clear that 'recreation' was no longer simply the product of rhetorical education and careful technical training but could sprout forth as a seemingly contingent side effect, thereby becoming a much valued and recognized part of the recreational sphere. In fact, what appears to be typical of the scholastic mindset as it would come to dictate the future of our educational ideals is that entertainment and education are somehow viewed as distinct spheres of human life, representing separate, if not altogether irreconcilable, compartments of civilization.

But what do we stand to gain if we decide to take up the challenge of this book and read the *Anticlaudianus* instead as a comment on the things that are lost? Here I want to state emphatically that among the things we may gain is a deeper understanding of the earlier paradise tradition as well as a deeper sense of its decline and transformation. Beginning with the latter, we thus can follow closely how the fixity of fiction starts slowly to solidify the earlier tradition of 'restoration through writing', allowing its scholastic practitioners to transmit its former findings in condensed and communicable form to future generations of readers and scholars. Yet reading the *Anticlaudianus* in the aforesaid retrospective way can also unveil to us with the clarity of hindsight and the concomitant transparency of vision, as if looking in a reverse Pauline mirror, what the possibilities were that the earlier ambiguity actually held in store, possibilities that would later become irretrievably lost.

If so, then the next question follows immediately. For why then did these things, meaning these infinite possibilities comprised in the notion of ambiguity, become lost in the first place? Why is it not an acceptable vision for the historian of early medieval thought and literature to embrace the clarity of scholasticism simply as an organic realization of possibilities that were already lying dormant before, but could only now be brought to fruition under the influence of various new intellectual developments? As I have tried to argue in the last two chapters of this book, this is clearly not the thesis that this book espouses. Scholasticism cannot be seen as simply instigating the separation of literature and theology in the same way as it triggered the reification of other educational disciplines. The reason is that due to the deep undercurrents and strong hold of the former paradise-ideals it could do so only by instigating a cultural make-

over, thereby creating a completely new cultural ideal, one in which imagination and analysis were seen as fundamentally separate.

Still, there is one final question that needs to be asked, if not perhaps answered, before we can close this book. Why then is it, so this final question forces us to ask, that with the transition to scholasticism, the infinite possibilities of the so-called 'hermeneutics of proliferation' could no longer persist, coming to fruition in some other form perhaps, but were doomed instead to vanish without a trace? Was it truly inescapable that with the demise of the early medieval cultural paradigm they were bound to evaporate as well?

Having reached the end of this study, I am inclined to say that the reason for their disappearance is not that the early medieval culture of which they were an integral part somehow malfunctioned, even though it may have shown other signs of wear. Its individual aspects—the school setting, the integration of epistemology and salvation history, the interface of cosmology and anthropology, the partial overlap of reason and affection—were so flexibly integrated into its original structure that malfunction was simply not likely. But here again the coherence of early medieval culture may well have been its greatest weakness, to the extent that once these individual aspects became loose to flourish and develop a life of their own, repair of the overarching cultural paradigm was simply no longer an option. The future would lie instead with engaging in the fine-tuning of various disciplinary techniques of human re-creation rather than in embracing recreation in a theologizing way as their collective ideal.

In trying to take up this latter challenge, as somehow he still seems wont to do in the *Anticlaudianus*, Alan proves himself a master of human re-creation indeed. When according to my judgment as a poet he nevertheless fails at meeting this challenge, it is not because his poem falls short of resonating with the comprehensive ideals of divine creation, as Alan still attempts to mediate between paradise as reality and paradise as paradigm, but because in the end he falls victim to the success of his own poetry. For whereas God was able to speak to Adam in paradise, even though their conversation was abruptly cut short, and the monks participated in this same conversation by meditating and praying to Christ, so in a more amorphous but remarkably coherent way early medieval scholars had likewise been able to engage the divine through the writing of their own capturing texts. Yet when at the height of his own creative success, the birth of a New Man, the poem's hero appears suddenly

unable to engage in conversation, his success story appears ultimately blocked by a surplus, rather than shortage, of his creator's literary dexterity. It is true that in conformity with the older paradise-conversation, Alan's new paradise still speaks to the imagination, perhaps it even calls for action.⁴¹ But once the golden age is established on earth, his New Man becomes a silent witness, one who speaks to the imagination only because he no longer speaks, his voice suppressed as it is taken over by the human poet.⁴² Hence, lacking the stature of paradise, the golden age that Alan foresees cannot but be relegated to the utopias of fiction, with the glory of his New Man and other poetic heroes safely ensconced within the glorious books of human poetry. In this, more literary capacity, however, they will have a long life to come.

Long life to you, o book, over which I have toiled and sweated long and continuously, you whose fame slander already impairs. Do not try to rival the poets of old but rather follow with reverence the steps of the ancients and let the lowly tamarisks take second place to the laurels. Now the ship, avoiding Scylla and the monster, Charibdis, sails on a calm sea to the harbor. Now the mariner rejoices at the sight of land; now the runner is at the winning post; the anchor is fast in the harbor. However, the mariner, after negotiating the heaving sea, trembles and fears that, though he has been safe asea, he may be shipwrecked and lost ashore, that spite may rage against him or slander

⁴¹ See Simpson's reflections on Alan's philosopher-king, *Sciences and the Self*, 92–133. Simpson argues that, whereas Alan's *Plaint* is essentially ethical, in the sense that it conjoins the cosmological and anthropological lines known from the *Timaeus* and similarly implemented in the *Cosmographia* of Bernard Silvestris, Alan's *Anticlaudianus*, esp. in its last three books, is essentially political. This does not entail an unqualified optimistic belief in politics, but rather an inherent skepticism. As Simpson states on p. 115: 'The establishment of the ideal king in Book IX leads inevitably to investigation of the cosmos in Books I–VI. This in itself qualifies the political renovation imagined at the end of the poem: such a renovation requires a cosmology. But the daring and optimistic presentation of the triumph of natural virtues at the end of the poem is more radically qualified, since Alan is concerned to show how the realm of Nature has its basis in supra-rational and supernatural divine sources. Despite the apparent climax of the poem in the political triumph of the natural man, the poem as a whole is concerned to reveal the provisional nature of that triumph'.

⁴² In line with Simpson's qualified emphasis on the poem's political nature, Johan Huizinga saw Alan's New Man essentially as a 'roi fainéant'. See also his criticism of the concept of the New Man in his *Über die Verknüpfung des Poetischen mit dem Theologischen bei Alanus de Insulis* (Amsterdam, 1932), 53–54: 'Es lässt sich kaum leugnen, dass gerade in der Ausarbeitung des zentralen Themas die schwächste Stelle des *Anticlaudianus* liegt'.

sink her teeth in him who, as he brings his work to a fitting conclusion, has drained his energy in writing and borne the burden of the toil. If spite pours out her whisperings for the present and wishes to ruin the reputation of the poet and waylay his newly-won honors, at least she will be silent after his death.⁴³

⁴³ See Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, ed. Bossuat, 197; trans. Sheridan, 216–17.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AHDLMA	Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge
CCSL	Corpus Scriptorum, Series Latina
CCCM	Corpus Scriptorum, Continuatio Medievalis
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
SC	Sources Chrétiennes

LATIN APPENDIX

Introduction

Introduction, n. 4:

William of Conches, *Philosophia* I, XI § 39, ed. Maurach (Pretoria, 1980), 35. Ex inordinata igitur iactatione (non quae fuit, sed esse potuit) deus elementa redegit in ordinem, veluti si monitu alicuius nostri amici aliquid quod contingeret nisi ipse moneret, fugiamus, dicimus “Iste liberavit nos ab hoc malo,” non quia hoc malum primum fuisset et postea nos inde liberaret, sed quia nisi iste esset, nobis accideret.

Introduction, n. 5:

Peter Abelard, *Commentary on Romans* II (3:26), ed. Buytaert (Turnhout, 1969), CCCM 11: 117:

In quo etiam iustiores facti sumus per mortem Filii Dei quam ante eramus, ut a poenis iam liberari debeamus? Cui etiam pretium sanguinis datum est ut redimeremur, nisi ei in cuius potestate eramus, hoc est ipsius, ut dictum est, Dei, qui nos tortori suo commiserat? Neque enim tortores, sed domini eorum pretia captiuorum componunt aut suscipiunt. Quomodo etiam hoc pretio captiuos dimisit, si ipse prius hoc pretium exegerit aut instituerit ut captiuos dimitteret?

Chapter One

Chapter 1 n. 3:

Johannes Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* I 441A, CCCM 161: 3:

N(utritor): Saepe mihi cogitanti diligentiusque quantum uires suppetunt inquirenti rerum omnium quae uel animo percipi possunt uel intentionem eius superant primam summamque diuisionem esse in ea quae sunt et in ea quae non sunt horum omnium generale uocabulum occurrit quod graece ΦΥCIC, latine uero natura uocitatur. An tibi aliter uidetur?

A(lumnus): Immo consentio. Nam et ego, dum ratiocinandi uiam ingredior, haec ita fieri reperio.

N: Est igitur natura generale nomen, ut diximus, omnium quae sunt et quae non sunt?

A: Est quidem. Nihil enim cogitationibus nostris potest occurrere quod tali uocabulo ualeat carere.

Chapter 1 n. 7:

Johannes Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* I 499D, CCCM 161: 80:

Deus siquidem infinitus informisque, quoniam a nullo formatur, dum sit

forma omnium. . . . Nam summa omnium causa per excellentiam omnium formarum finiumque informis est atque infinita. . . .

Chapter 1 n. 8:

Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, Megacosmos IV 9, ed. Dronke, 118–19: Mundus enim quiddam continuum, et in ea cathena nichil dissipabile vel abruptum. Unde illum rotunditas, forma perfectior, circumscribit.

Chapter 1 n. 17:

Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, Megacosmos III 260–64, ed. Dronke, 110–11;

Secana prosiliit, ubi grandia germina regum—
Pipinos, Karolos—bellica terra tulit.

Emicuit Ligeris, ubi Martinopolis inter
Sidereos fluvios pictaque rura sedet.

Chapter 1 n. 18:

Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, Megacosmos III 317–38, ed. Dronke, 112–13:

At potius iacet Aurore vicinus et Euro

Telluris gremio floridiore locus,

Cui sol dulcis adhuc primo blanditur in ortu,

Cum primeva nichil flamma nocere potest.

Illic temperies, illic clementia celi

Floribus et vario germine pregnat humum.

Nutrit odora, parit species: pretiosa locorum,

Mundi delitias angulus unus habet.

Surgit ea gingiber humo, surgitque galanga

Longior, et socia bachare dulce thimum;

Perpetui quem floris honos commendat achantus,

Grataque conficiens unguina nardus olet.

Pallescitque crocus ad purpureos iacinctos,

Ad casie thalamos certat odore macis.

Inter felices silvas sinuosus oberrat

Inflexo tociens tramite rivus aque,

Arboribusque strepens et conflictata lapillis

Labitur in prunum murmure limpha fugax.

HOS, REOR, INCOLUIT RIGUOS PICTOSQUE RECESSUS

HOSPES—SED BREVIOR HOSPITE—PRIMUS HOMO.

Hoc studio curante nemus Natura creavit—

Surgit fortuitis cetera silva locis.

Chapter 1 n. 19:

Johannes Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* IV 809A, ed. Jeaneau, CCCM 164: 95–96:

Ac si aperte diceret: Inchoabat uiuere homo in paradiso, inchoabat uiuere fruens deo, inchoabat uiuere sine ulla egestate. Haec enim species prae-

teriti temporis ab his qui uerborum significationes acute perspiciunt inchoatiua uocatur: inchoationem quippe et auspicium cuiuspiam rei significat, quae iam ad perfectionem nullo modo peruenit.

Chapter 1 n. 53:

Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus* VI.434–47, ed. Bossuat, 153–54:

Tunc Noys ad regis preceptum singula rerum
 Vestigans exempla, nouam perquirat ydeam.
 Inter tot species speciem uix inuenit illam
 Quam petit; offertur tandem quesita petenti.
 In cuius speculo locat omnis gracia sedem:
 Forma Ioseph, sensus Ytide, potencia just
 Iob, zelus Finees Moÿsique modestia, Iacob
 Simplicitas Abraheque fides pietasque Thobie.
 Hanc formam Noys ipsa Deo presentat, ut eius
 Formet ad exemplar animam. Tunc ille sigillum
 Sumpsit, ad ipsius forme uestigia formam
 Dans anime, uultum qualem deposcit ydea
 Imprimit exemplo, totas usurpat ymago
 Exemplaris opes, loquiturque figura sigillum.

Chapter Two

Chapter 2 n. 20:

Johannes Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* IV 744B, CCCM 164: 5:

In sudore enim uultus sui panem iussa est uesci, terramque sanctae scripturae, spinas et tribulos (hoc est diuinorum intellectuum exilem densitatem) sibi germinantem studiumque sapientiae spernentibus inuiam assiduis theoriae gressibus lustrare . . .

Chapter 2 n. 46:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 1. 3–6, ed. Häring, 555: Postea uero ad sensum littere hystorialem exponendum ueniam ut et allegoricam et moralem lectionem que a sanctis doctoribus aperte execute sunt ex toto pretermittam.

Chapter 2 n. 49:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 3. 35–40, ed. Häring, 556:

Hanc distinctionem causarum Moyses in libro apertissime declarat. Nam cum dicit IN PRINCIPIO CREAUIT DEUS CELUM ET TERRAM ostendit efficientem causam: scilicet deum. Ostendit etiam materialem scilicet quatuor elementa que nomine celi et terre appellat. Et ipsa eadem a deo esse creata approbat cum dicit IN PRINCIPIO CREAUIT DEUS CELUM ET TERRAM et cetera.

Chapter 2 n. 50:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 3. 41–43, ed. Häring, 556: Ubicumque uero dicit DIXIT DEUS et cetera ibidem notat formalem causam que est dei sapientia quia ipsius auctoris dicere nichil est aliud quam in coeterna sibi sapientia future rei formam disponere.

Chapter 2 n. 51:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 3. 47–49, ed. Häring, 556:

Nam eius conditoris uidere quod aliquid bonum creatum sit nichil est aliud quam id ipsum quod creauit ei placere in eadem benignitate ex qua creauit.

Chapter 2 n. 52:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 3. 54–56, ed. Häring, 556–57:

Nam Pater est efficiens causa Filius uero formalis Spiritus sanctus finalis quatuor uero elementa materialis. Ex quibus quatuor causis uniuersa corporea substantia habet subsistere.

Chapter 2 n. 53:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 3. 50–54, ed. Häring, 556:

In materia igitur que est quatuor elementa operatur summa Trinitas ipsam materiam creando in hoc quod est efficiens causa: creatam informando et disponendo in eo quod est formalis causa: informatam et dispositam diligendo et gubernando in eo quod est finalis causa.

Chapter 2 n. 58:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 7. 85–87, ed. Häring, 558:

Aere uero ex superioris elementi uirtute illuminato, conseqebatur naturaliter ut, ipsius aeris illuminatione mediante, calefaceret ignis tercium elementum i.e. aquam et calefaciendo suspenderet uaporaliter super aera.

Chapter 2 n. 59:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 8. 4–6, ed. Häring, 558: Et tunc aer aptus fuit ut FIRMAMENTUM appellaretur quasi firme sustinens superiorem aquam et inferiorem continens: utramque ab altera intransgressibiliter determinans.

Chapter 2 n. 64:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 25. 29–31, ed. Häring, 566:

Cum enim ipsa materia ex se sit informis non potest ullo modo formam adipisci nisi ex uirtute artificis operante atque ipsam ordinante. Hanc uirtutem philosophi diuersis nominibus appellauerunt.

Chapter 2 n. 65:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 24. 12–16, ed. Häring, 565: Informitas autem illorum elementorum in eo tunc consistebat quod unumquodque eorum fere erat huiusmodi quale alterum. Et quia minimum erat uel fere nichil quod intererat idcirco illa differentia pro nichilo a philosophis reputabatur et illa elementa sic confusa una informis materia dicebantur.

Chapter 2 n. 69:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 16. 93–95, ed. Häring, 561:

Quicquid igitur post sextum diem uel natum uel creatum est non nouo modo creationis institutum est sed aliquo predictorum modorum substantiam suam sortitur.

Chapter 2 n. 70:

Thierry of Chartres, *Tractatus de sex dierum operibus* 14. 79–82, ed. Häring, 561: Mediante uero humore uitalis ille calor naturaliter usque ad terrena peruenit et inde animalia terre creata sunt. In quorum numero homo AD IMAGINEM ET SIMILITUDINEM dei factus est. Et huius sexte conuersionis spacium sexta DIES appellatum est.

Chapter 2 n. 72:

Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae* II. 35–39, ed. Häring, 809–10:

Et quamuis tanta esset pulcritudinis leticia, huius tamen risum decoris fletus inestimabilis extinguere conabatur. Ros namque furtiuus, ex oculorum scaturigine deriuatus, fluxum doloris predicabat interni. Ipsa etiam facies, in terram casto pudore demissa, ipsi puelle illatam quodammodo loquebatur iniuriam.

Chapter 2 n. 73:

Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae* VI. 4–10, ed. Häring, 824–25:

Quam postquam michi cognatam loci proximitate prospexi, in faciem decedens, mentem stupore uulneratus exiui totusque in extasis alienatione sepultus sensuumque incarcerationis uirtutibus nec uiuens nec mortuus inter utrumque neuter laborabam. Quem uirgo amicabiliter erigens, pedes ebrios sustentantium manuum confortabat solatio meque suis innectendo complexibus meique ora pudicis osculis dulcorando mellifluoque sermonis medicamine a stuporis morbo curauit infirmum.

Chapter 2 n. 75:

Alan of Lille *De planctu naturae* VIII. 217–23, ed. Häring, 840:

Sed postquam uniuersalis artifex uniuersa suarum naturarum uultibus inuestiuit omniaque sibi inuicem legitimis proportionum connubiis maritauit. . . . statuit ut expresse conformationis monetata sigillo sub deriuata propagationis calle legitimo ex similibus similia ducerentur.

Chapter 2 n. 76:

Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae* VIII. 235–41, ed. Häring, 840–41:

Sed quia sine subadministratorii artificis artificio suffragante tot rerum species expolire non poteram meque in etheree regionis amenante palatio placuit commorari . . . Venerem in fabrili scientia conpertam meeque operationis subuicariam in mundiali suburbio collocaui. . . .

Chapter 2 n. 77:

Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae* VIII. 101–07, ed. Häring, 836:

Iam mee solutionis lima tue questionis scrupulum elimauit. Ideo enim a supernis celestis regie secretariis egrediens, ad huius caduce terrenitatis occasum deueni, ut de execrabilibus hominum excessibus tecum quasi cum familiari et secretario meo queremoniale lamentum deponerem tecumque decernerem, tali criminum oppositioni qualis debeat pene dari responsio, ut predictorum facinorum morsus coequata punitio pene talione remordeat.

Chapter 2 n. 78:

Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae* XVI. 187–213, esp. 208–13, ed. Häring, 872:

Quoniam ergo res nostra communi degrassatione uexatur, te precibus meliens, tibi obedientie uirtute precipiens et iubendo moneo et monendo iubeo quatinus, omni excusationis sophismate relegato, ad nos matures accessum, ut mei mearumque uirginum assistente presentia, abhominacionis filios a sacramentali ecclesie nostre communione seiungens cum debita officii sollempnitate seuera excommunicationis uirga percutias.

Chapter 2 n. 79:

Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae* XVIII. 164–65, ed. Häring, 879:

Huius igitur imaginarie uisionis subtracto speculo, me ab extasis excitatum insompnio prior mystice apparitionis dereliquit aspectus.

Chapter 2 n. 80:

Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae* VIII. 164–72, ed. Häring, 838:

Tunc illa: Iam ex prelibatis potes elicere quid misticum figuret scissure figurata parenthesis. Cum enim, ut prediximus, plerique homines in suam matrem uiciorum armentur iniuriis, inter se et ipsam maximum chaos dissensionis firmantes, in me uiolentas manus uiolenter iniciunt et mea sibi particulatim uestimenta diripiunt et, quam reuerentie deberent honore uestire, me uestibus orphanatam, quantum in ipsis est, cogunt meretricaliter lupanare. Hoc ergo integumentum hoc scissura depingitur quod solius hominis iniuriis insultibus mea pudoris ornamenta discidii contumelias paciuntur.

Chapter Three

Chapter 3 n. 32:

William of Conches, *Philosophia* I, XIII §§ 42–43, ed. Maurach, 38:

42. Sed cum terra ex superposita aqua esset lutosa, ex calore bulliens, creavit ex se diversa genera animalium. . . .

43. Ex quadam vero parte, in qua elementa aequaliter convenerunt, humanum corpus factum est. . . . Non enim credendum est animam, quae spiritus est et levis et munda, ex luto factam esse, sed a deo homini collatam. . . . Sed quoniam, quod est proximum aequalitati, etsi minus, tamen aliquanto temperatum, ex vicino limo terrae corpus mulieris esse creatum verisimile est, et ideo nec penitus idem quod homo nec penitus diversa ab homine nec ita temperata ut homo, quia calidissima frigidior est frigidissimo viro . . . Non enim ad litteram credendum est deum excostasse primum hominem.

Chapter 3 n. 33:

William of Conches, *Philosophia* IV, VII § 15, ed. Maurach, 95:

Sed quoniam de compositione primi hominis et feminae, qualiter ex limo terrae homo factus sit, in primo volumine docuimus, de cotidiana hominis creatione, formatione, nativitate, aetatibus, membris, de officiis et utilitatibus membrorum dicamus.

Chapter 3 n. 37:

William of Conches, *Glosae super Platonem* § X, ed. Jeauneau, 67:

Commentum enim, solam sententiam exequens, de continuatione vel expositione litere nichil agit. Glosa vero omnia illa exequitur. Unde dicitur glosa id est lingua. Ita enim aperte debet exponere ac si lingua doctoris videatur docere.

Chapter 3 n. 38:

William of Conches, *Glosae super Platonem* § CXIX, ed. Jeauneau, 210–11:

Sed quid mirum si achademicus (i.e., Plato) alicubi achademicè loquatur? Si enim ubique bene diceret, achademicus non esset.

Chapter 3 n. 40:

William of Conches, *Glosae super Platonem* § CXIX, ed. Jeauneau, 211:

Si quis tamen non verba tantum sed sensum Platonis cognoscat, non tantum non inveniet heresim sed profundissimam philosophiam integumentis verborum tectam. Quod nos, Platonem diligentes, ostendamus.

Chapter 3 n. 42:

William of Conches, *Glosae super Platonem* § XLII, ed. Jeauneau, 110:

Omnes enim sermones ad loquendum de creaturis inventi sunt sed postea, cognito Creatore, propter quandam similitudinem ad loquendum de Deo sunt translati ut hoc nomen: pater, filius, et hec verba: genuit, creavit, fecit, voluit.

Chapter 3 n. 45:

William of Conches, *Glosae super Platonem* § CLXXII, ed. Jeaneau, 283–84: Traducibile est quod ad contraria uno eodemque tempore potest traduci, ut opinio: modo enim unum opinamur, modo contrarium. Sed intellectus non est traducibilis, quia ex quo aliquid intellectu percipimus, quia certa ratio semper sequitur intellectum, nunquam ad contrarium traducimur.

Chapter 3 n. 63:

William of Conches, *Dragmaticon* I.7.4, CCCM 152: 31:

Quia igitur natura et artifex non poterant ad operationem creatoris ascendere, uoluit creator ad illorum operationem condescendere. Si enim hoc non esset, debilitas naturae putaretur, quociens ab ea aliqua mixta crearentur. Vel, ut alii dicunt, mixtim creauit ut significaret quanta confusio rerum esse posset, nisi sua dilectio res ordinaret.

Chapter 3 n. 67:

William of Conches, *Dragmaticon* II.2.8, CCCM 152: 39:

Mundum istum ad similitudinem oui constitutum esse philosophi confirmant. Vt igitur in medio oui est meditullium—ex cuius omni parte est albumen, circa albumen tela, circa quam testa, extra quam nichil est de ouo—sic in medio mundi est terra, circa eam ex omni parte fluit aqua, circa aquam aer, circa quem ignis, extra quem nichil est.

Chapter 3 n. 68:

William of Conches, *Dragmaticon* II.4.2–3, CCCM 152: 43:

Philosophus: In potentia diuina nullum pono terminum sed tamen dico quod, si hoc fecisset, aer non esset, sine cuius spiritu homo ultra septem horas uiuere non potest, nec aqua, cuius usus in multis homini est necessarius.

Dux: Si sine homine uellet Deus mundum esse, posset unum medium inter haec extrema sufficere?

Philosophus: Manente rerum natura, non.

Chapter 3 n. 70:

William of Conches, *Dragmaticon* VI.13.2–3, CCCM 152: 227:

Primus enim homo inter quatuor qualitates fuit temperatus. Sed postquam amoenitate paradisi expulsus in ualle lacrimarum et miseriae in labore manuum suarum coepit uesci pane, suo labore uigiliis ieiuniis cepit desicari atque naturalis calor extingui. Similiter ex intemperie aeris, ex qualitate cibi et potus. [3] Omnes igitur ex eo nati, utpote ex corrupto, sunt corrupti, neque postea perfecta sanitas in homine fuit inuenta.

Chapter 3 n. 73:

William of Conches, *Dragmaticon* VI.26.4, CCCM 152: 267:

Intelligentia ex ratione nascitur, non quod ratio fiat intelligentia, sed quia causa est illius. Cum enim primi homines ratione ducente naturas corporum cognoscerent, perpenderunt quid corpora agere possent, percipientesque

actus qui ex corporibus esse non possent, perpenderunt agentem esse qui corpus non erat. Hunc uocauerunt spiritum, dirigentesque in ipsum acumen ingenii, prius de eo opiniones habuerunt quasdam falsas, quasdam ueras. Falsas uero longo labore, magna industria eliminauerunt; ueras necessariis argumentis confirmauerunt. Sicque ducente ratione nata est intelligentia. Est enim intelligentia uerum et certum de incorporeis iudicium.

Chapter 3 n. 74:

William of Conches, *Dragmaticon* III.2.8, CCCM 152: 60:

Quid est stultius quam affirmare aliquid esse, quia creator potest illud facere? Facitne quicquid potest? Qui igitur Deum aliquid contra naturam facere dicit, uel sic esse oculis uideat, uel rationem quare hoc sit ostendat, uel utilitatem ad quam hoc sit praetendat.

Chapter 3 n. 75:

William of Conches, *Dragmaticon* VI.27.4, CCCM 152: 272:

Quamuis uero sanguinea complexio habilis sit ad doctrinam, quippe in omnibus temperata, tamen in omni aliquis perfectus cum labore potest esse, quia *labor improbus omnia uincit* (cf. Vergil, *Georgics* I.145).

Chapter 3 n. 78:

William of Conches, *Dragmaticon* VI.27.4, CCCM 152: 272:

Terminus uero doctrinae est mors. Vnde quidam sapiens, cum ab eo quaereretur, ubi esset terminus discendi, respondit: 'Vbi et uitae'. Quidam uero philosophus, cum nonagenarius moreretur, inquisitus a quodam suo discipulo, si de morte doleret, ait: 'Sic'. Quo interrogante, quare, respondit: 'Quia nunc incipiebam discere'.

Chapter 3 n. 82:

William of Conches, *Glosae super Platonem* § XLVII, ed. Jeaneau, 115:

Quandoquidem sufficiunt rationes de mundo verisimiles et non necessarie, ergo si per omnia non dicam necessaria ne mireris. Ita habemus a Platone quod de Deo nichil est dicendum nisi verum et necessarium sed de corporibus quod nobis verisimile videtur etsi aliter possit esse.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4 n. 3:

Peter Abelard, *Historia calamitatum*, ed. Monfrin, lines 192–95: . . . sed me vehementer mirari quod his qui litterari sunt ad expositiones sanctorum intelligendas ipsa eorum scripta vel glose non sufficiunt, ut alio scilicet non egeant magisterio. . . .

Chapter 4 n. 26:

Peter Abelard, *Historia calamitatum*, ed. Monfrin, lines 690–95:

Accidit autem mihi ut ad ipsum fidei nostre fundamentum humane rationis similitudinibus disserendum primo me applicarem, et quendam theologiae tractatum *De Unitate et Trinitate divina* scholaribus nostris componerem, qui humanas et philosophicas rationes requirebant, et plus que intelligi quam que dici possent efflagitabant.

Chapter 4 n. 29:

Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* I.V.5.10, ed. Green, 16–17:

Res igitur quibus fruendum est, pater et filius et spiritus sanctus, eademque trinitas, una quaedam summa res communisque omnibus fruentibus ea, si tamen res et non rerum omnium causa, si tamen et causa.

Boethius, *De trinitate* I, ed. Rand, 4–6:

Christianae religionis reverentiam plures usurpant, sed ea fides pollet maxime ac solitarie quae cum propter universalium praecepta regularum, quibus eiusdem religionis intellegatur auctoritas, tum propterea, quod eius cultus per omnes paene mundi terminos emanavit, catholica vel universalis vocatur. Cuius haec de trinitatis unitate sententia est: ‘Pater’, inquit, ‘deus filius deus spiritus sanctus deus’. Igitur pater filius spiritus sanctus unus non tres dii. Cuius coniunctionis ratio est indifferentia.

Chapter 4 n. 33:

Bernard of Clairvaux, *Epistola 190* against Abelard, addressed to Innocentius II:

Tibi proinde sint quae tua sunt. Ego Prophetas et Apostolos audio, oboedio Evangelio, sed non Evangelio secundum Petrum. Tu novum nobis condidis Evangelium? Quintum Ecclesia Evangelistam non recipit.

Chapter 4 n. 36:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia ‘Summi boni’* II.V.109, CCCM 13: 153:

Preterea, sicut in grammatica, cum dicimus tres personas determinate intelligimus loquentem et ad quem loquitur et de quo loquitur, ut supra meminimus, ita cum dicimus in diuinitate tres esse personas, determinate intelligi conuenit patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum, ut supra quoque astruximus.

Chapter 4 n. 39:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* I.1, CCCM 12: 72:

Summi boni perfectionem, quod Deus est, ipsa Dei sapientia incarnata Christus Dominus describendo tribus nominibus diligenter distinxit, cum unicam et singularem, indiuiduam penitus ac simplicem substantiam diuinam Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum tribus de causis appellauerit: Patrem quidem secundum illam unicam . . . potentiam; Filium . . . secundum . . . propriae sapientiae discretionem . . .; Spiritum Sanctum . . . secundum illam benignitatis suae gratiam. . .

Chapter 4 n. 41:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.2, CCCM 13: 114:

Vnde peropportunum nobis uisum est ex scriptis precellentium sapientium ad nostre fidei firmamentum auctoritates contulisse, et insuper ipsas auctoritate rationibus fulcire in his in quibus non irrationabiliter uidentur oppugnari, maxime ideo ne uerbositas inimicorum Christi nostre insultet simplicitati. Qui cum aliquos idiotas aut minus eruditos christianos inductionum suarum laqueis prepedierint, summe id sibi glorie ascribunt.

Chapter 4 n. 42:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.III.76, CCCM 13: 140:

...disce locutionum modos ab ipsa sapientia dei incarnata traditos atque a sanctis patribus, quos spiritus sancti organum fuisse uita ipsorum et miracula attestantur.

Chapter 4 n. 44:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.21, CCCM 13: 121:

Que etiam maior indignatio fidelibus habenda esset quam eum se habere deum profiteri quem ratiuncula humana possit comprehendere aut mortaliū lingua disserere?

Chapter 4 n. 46:

Peter Abelard, *Expositio in Hexaemeron*, PL 178: 777C:

Hinc etiam uitam lignum scientiae boni et mali dici assignant, quod ex fructu ejus uinum productum moderate vel immoderate sumptum hominem reddat scientem bonum vel malum, i.e. bono vel malo sensu eum esse faciat, cujus scilicet ingenium vel acuit vel pervertit.

Chapter 4 n. 48:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.III.73, CCCM 13: 139:

Quid itaque mirum si, cum omnia ineffabiliter transcendat deus, omnem institutionis humane sermonem excedat? Et cum eius excellentia omnem longe exsuperet intellectum, propter intellectus autem uoces institute sint, quid mirum si effectus transcendit qui transcendit et causas? Multo quippe facilius res excogitari potest quam edisseri ualet. Quid etiam mirum si in seipso deus philosophorum regulas infringat, qui in factis suis eas frequenter quassat, cum uidelicet aliqua noua contra naturam facit siue supra naturam, hoc est supra hoc quod prima rerum institutio potest?

Chapter 4 n. 56:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.I.28, CCCM 13: 123–24:

Primum itaque ponendum est totius disputationis thema et summa fidei breuiter concludenda, de unitate scilicet diuine substantie ac trinitate personarum que in deo sunt, immo deus sunt unus. Deinde obiectiones aduersus positionem fidei, tandem solutiones subiciemus.

Chapter 4 n. 59:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia 'Summi boni'* II.18–19, CCCM 13: 119–20:

Qui nisi mentem instruat interior, frustra qui docet aerem uerberat exterior. Quid est enim quod, cum alicuius doctoris uerba equaliter ad aures diuersorum perferuntur, nec tamen equaliter ab eis intelliguntur, nisi quod quibusdam presto est interior magister, quibusdam minime, qui quos uult etiam sine uerbo docet? De huius quidem magistri sapientia scriptum est: *In maluiolam animam non introibit sapientia nec habitabit in corpore subdito peccatis* (Sap. 1,4). Quod nec ipsos latuit philosophos, qui noticiam dei non ratiocinando, sed bene uiuendo acquirendam censebant et ad eam moribus potius quam uerbis nitendum esse suadebant. Vnde Socrates, ut supra meminimus, nolebat immundos terrenis cupiditatibus animos se in diuina conari et ideo purgande bonis moribus uite censebat instandum.

Chapter 4 n. 65:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* I.53–54, CCCM 12: 93–94:

Liquet itaque ex supra positis tam Verbum Dei quam Spiritum eius Deum esse, sicut et ipse cuius est Verbum uel Spiritus. Intelligant igitur, ut dictum est, hoc Verbum Domini, id est Filium Dei, non transitorium uerbum, non audibile, sed intellectuale, hoc est ipsam rationem siue sapientiam coaeternam Deo, quam dici conuenit 'omnisapientiam' sicut et dicimus omnipotentiam. . . . [54] Nunc autem post testimonia prophetarum de fide sanctae Trinitatis, libet etiam testimonia philosophorum subponere, quos ad unius Dei intelligentiam tum ipsa philosophiae ratio perduxit, qua iuxta Apostolum: *Inuisibilia ipsius Dei a creatura mundi per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur* (Rom. 1:20); tum ipsa continentissimae uitae sobrietas quodam eius merito id ipsis acquisiuit. Oportebat quippe ut tunc etiam in ipsis praesignaret Deus per aliquod abundantioris gratiae donum, quam acceptior sit ei qui sobrie uiuit et se ab illecebris huius mundi per contemptum eius subtrahit, quam qui uoluptatibus eius deditus spurcitiis omnibus se immergit.

Chapter 4 n. 71:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* I.104, CCCM 12: 114 (cf. Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis* I.2.13–14):

Sciendum est, inquit, non in omnem disputationem philosophos admittere fabulosa, sed his uti solent cum uel de anima uel de aethereis potestatibus loquuntur. Ceterum cum ad summum Deum et principem omnium . . . tractatus se audet attollere, uel ad mentem quam Greci noun appellant . . . — cum de his, inquam, loquuntur summo deo et mente, nihil fabulosam penitus attingunt. Sed si quid in his assignare conantur quae non sermonem tantummodo sed cogitationem quoque superant humanam, ad similitudines et exempla confugiunt.

Chapter 4 n. 74:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* I.117, CCCM 12: 122:

Quae etiam cum exponi ueraciter aut conuenienter nullatenus queant, . . . ipsa nos littera ad expositionem mysticam compellit.

Chapter 4 n. 75:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* I.113, CCCM 12: 119:

Cum autem de Deo vel noy nasci siue creari siue fieri anima quandoque a philosophis dicitur, abusio est uerborum magis quam error sententiae.

Chapter 4 n. 76:

Peter Abelard, *Ethica*, ed. Luscombe, p. 66; cf. *Scito te ipsum* I.45, CCCM 190: 44:

Sic et illos qui persequebantur Christum uel suos quos persequendos credebant per operationem peccasse dicimus, qui tamen grauius per culpam peccassent si contra conscientiam eis parcerent.

Chapter 4 n. 77:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* I.117, CCCM 12: 121:

. . . attendat illam Caiphae prophetiam quam Spiritus Sanctus per eum protulit, longe ad alium sensum eam accommodans quam prolator ipse senserit.

Chapter 4 n. 79:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* II.15–16, CCCM 12: 140:

Quis etiam asserat nullis eorum fidem incarnationis reuelatam esse . . . licet haec in eorum scriptis non uideatur expressa . . .? [16] Quod si ad allegoriam dicta quoque philosophorum accipi fas esset, quis non conuenienter ad mysterium redemptionis mundi animaduertat deflectendum esse, quod Plato asserit Deum in ipsa mundi compositione duas longitudes in speciem chi Graecae litterae sibi inuicem applicuisse curuasque in orbem, ut ipsum mundi perficeret globum?—quasi mystice perhibeat uniuersorum hominum salutem, quam ipsius mundi ueram intelligimus constitutionem, in ipsa dominicae crucis passione consummatam fuisse.

Chapter 4 n. 80:

Peter Abelard, *Expositio in Hexaemeron*, PL 178: 746D:

Naturam itaque dicimus vim rerum ex illa prima praeparatione illis colatam ad aliquid inde nascendum, hoc est efficiendum sufficientem.

Chapter 4 n. 81:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* II.29, CCCM 12: 144:

Hunc Plato optimum et ineffabilem omnium naturarum conditorem asserit, qui cum omnia possit et ab eo longe relegata sit omnis inuidia, omnia tam bona condidit quantum singulorum natura permittebat, uel ipse ordo et concinnitas rerum postulabat. Dixit et Moysis omnia a Deo ualde bona esse facta. Sed plus aliquantulum laudis diuinae bonitati Plato assignare uidetur,

cum tam bona facta dicit singula quantum eorum natura permittebat uel opportunum erat. Vbi etiam adiecit ipsam Dei uoluntatem recte omnium creatarum rerum causam arbitrari, ac si omnia ideo facta atque optime facta intelligat, quia optimus artifex ita facienda decreuit, cuius ad omnia sufficit uoluntas quae nullatenus cassa esse potest.

Chapter 4 n. 86:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* II. 109, CCCM 12: 181:

Nos putamus non perire nobis horam, diem, momenta, tempus, aetates, cum *otiosum uerbum* loquimur pro quo *rationem* reddituri sumus *in die iudicii*. Quod si hoc ille sine lege, sine Euangelio, sine Saluatoris et apostolorum doctrina, naturaliter et dixit et fecit, quod nos oportet facere . . .? Cf. Jerome's *Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians* III.6.10.

Chapter 4 n. 88:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* II.126, CCCM 12: 191:

Si iuuat Christianum legere ad eruditionem locutionum uel sententiarum, numquid hoc plene efficere non potest nisi poeticis studendo figmentis et inanibus fabulis? Quae sunt genera locutionum, qui ornatus uerborum quae sacra Pagina non habeat, maxime parabolarum et allegoriarum aenigmatibus referta et ubique fere mysticis redundans inuolucris? Quae sunt urbanitates locutionum quae mater linguarum Hebraica non docuerit, praesertim cum Palaestinae terrae etiam plebem parabolis esse assuetam non lateat, ut his quoque Dominum Iesum loqui eis oporteret cum Euangelium praedicaret?

Chapter 4 n. 89:

Peter Abelard, *Commentary on Romans* I (1:20), CCCM 11: 68:

Mysterium quippe incarnationis ex uisibilibus Dei operibus nequaquam concipi humana poterat ratione, sicut potentia Dei et sapientia eius et benignitas ex his quae uidebant liquide percipiebantur. In quibus quidem tribus totam Trinitatis distinctionem consistere credo.

Chapter 4 n. 90:

Peter Abelard, *Commentary on Romans* II (3:26), CCCM 11: 118:

Iustior quoque, id est amplius Deum diligens, quisque fit post passionem Christi quam ante, quia amplius in amorem accendit completum beneficium quam speratum.

Chapter 4 n. 94:

Peter Abelard, *Commentary on Romans* II (3:26), CCCM 11: 118:

Redemptio itaque nostra est illa summa in nobis per passionem Christi dilectio quae nos non solum a seruitute peccati liberat, sed ueram nobis filiorum Dei libertatem acquirit, ut amore eius potius quam timore cuncta impleamus, qui nobis tantam exhibuit gratiam qua maior inueniri ipso attestante non potest. *Maiores hac*, inquit, *dilectionem nemo habet quam ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis* (John 15:13).

Chapter 4 n. 96:

Peter Abelard, *Commentary on Romans* II (3:26), CCCM 11: 117:

Nobis autem uidetur quod in hoc iustificati sumus in sanguine Christi et Deo reconciliati, quod per hanc singularem gratiam nobis exhibitam quod Filius suus nostram suscepit naturam et in ipsa nos tam uerbo quam exemplo instituendo usque ad mortem perstitit, nos sibi amplius per amorem adstrixit, ut tanto diuinae gratiae accensi beneficio, nihil iam tolerare propter ipsum uera reformidet caritas.

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 n. 24:

Peter Abelard, *Ethica*, ed. Luscombe, 8:8–12; cf. *Scito te ipsum* I.5, CCCM 190: 5:

... nequaquam uoluntas ista tamquam mala est improbanda, per quam ille, ut dicis, mortem euadere, non dominum uoluit occidere, et tamen deliquit consentiendo, quamuis coactus timore mortis, iniustae interfectioni quam eum potius ferre quam inferre oportuit.

Chapter 5 n. 26:

Peter Abelard, *Ethica*, ed. Luscombe, 40:15–19; cf. *Scito te ipsum* I.25–26, CCCM 190: 26–27:

Vnde sepe per errorem uel per legis, ut diximus, coactionem innocentes punimus uel noxios absoluimus. *Probator et cognitor cordis et renum dicitur Deus* (Jer. 20:12), hoc est, 'quarumlibet intentionum ex affectione animae uel infirmitate seu delectatione carnis prouenientium.'

Chapter 5 n. 29:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia* 'Scholarium' II.29, CCCM 13: 421:

Nemo etenim scientiam aliquam recte malam esse dixerit, etiam illam quae de malo est; quae iusto homini deesse non potest, non ut malum agat, sed ut a malo precognito sibi prouideat, quod nisi cognitum teste Boetio uitare non potest. Non est enim malum scire decipere uel adulterari, sed ista committere, quia eius rei bona est cognitio cuius pessima est actio; et nemo peccat cognoscendo peccatum, sed committendo. Si qua autem scientia mala esset, utique et malum esset quaedam cognoscere ac iam absolui a malicia deus non posset, quia omnia nouit. In ipso enim solo omnium plenitudo est scientiarum cuius donum est omnis scientia. Scientia quippe est comprehensio ueritatis rerum quae sunt, atque is ueraciter cuncta discernit cui ea quoque *quae non sunt* (Rom. 4:17) quasi presentia assistunt.

Chapter 5 n. 33:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* I.20, CCCM 12: 79–80:

Verbum itaque dicit conceptum mentis et quamdam intelligentiae locutionem, quae in mente formatur, ad cuius similitudinem Vnigenitus Dei

dicitur et quasi quaedam eius intellectualis ac perpetua locutio, in cuius prouidentia omnium ab aeterno praefixa consistit operatio atque ordinatio.

Chapter 5 n. 37:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* I.95, CCCM 12: 111–12:

(Speaking about Plato again, having quoted a.o. Cicero, Pythagoras, Vergil and Macrobius) De cuius quidem summae rationis ordinatione, cum subditur quod haec ipsa, mundi uidelicet anima, ‘causas omnium quae proueniunt prouidet’, diuinam ei omnium naturarum prouidentiam assignat et diuinae plenitudinem scientiae; ex quo ipsa etiam Deus innuitur.

Chapter 5 n. 38:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* III.5, CCCM 12: 196:

Scimus quidem a Peripateticis, quos nunc dialecticos appellamus, nonnullas et maximas haereses tam Stoicorum quam Epicureorum rectis rationibus esse repressas, e.g., Stoic fate . . . non tamen ideo cuncta ex necessitate proveniunt, ut scilicet humani pereat libertas arbitrii.

Chapter 5 n. 41:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia ‘Scholarium’* II.89, CCCM 13: 451:

Ecce enim secundum ipsius domini documentum et, ut supra meminimus, testimonium Iob eum solum proprie esse profiteri cogimur quem penitus nichil esse constat secundum illam secularium disciplinam doctorum quae omnium rerum, ut dictum est, naturas in decem predicamenta distribuit. Attendite, fratres et uerbosi amici, quantum ab inuicem dissonent diuinae et humanae traditiones, spirituales et animales philosophi, sacrarum et secularium scripturarum disciplinae, nec tamquam temerarii iudices non arguatis, cum talia fides uerba protulerit quorum intelligentia uestris incognita sit disciplinis.

Chapter 5 n. 42:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia christiana* V.26–28, CCCM 12: 357–58 and *Theologia ‘Scholarium’* III.24–26, CCCM 13: 510–11:

Velle itaque Deus duobus modis dicitur, aut secundum uidelicet prouidentiae suae ordinationem, secundum quod scilicet aliquid disponit apud se ac deliberat statuitque in sua prouidentia, ut sic postmodum compleat; aut secundum consilii sui adhortationem uel approbationem qua unumquemque ad hoc admonet, quod per gratiam suam remunerare paratus esset. . . . Sic quippe unicuique homini consulit de salute sua et ad hanc eum adhortatur, cum obediant pauci.

Chapter 5 n. 44:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia ‘Scholarium’* III 49, CCCM 13: 521:

Cum autem dicimus deum posse illum saluare qui minime saluandus est, ad ipsam diuinitatis naturam possibilitatem reducimus, ut uidelicet naturae dei non repugnet quin eum saluet. Quod omnino falsum est.

Chapter 5 n. 51:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.107, CCCM 13: 544:

Non enim si recipiamus quia predestinatum omnem necesse est saluari, ideo de singulis predestinatis concedere cogimur ut tam hunc hominem quam illum dicamus quia necesse est saluari. Sublato quippe nomine predestinatorum, in quo est uis necessitatis sicut in apposita determinatione, non ita recipimus quia hunc uel illum necesse est saluari. Hinc in quodam sensu recipimus quod predestinatum necesse est saluari, hoc est eum qui talis est, cum sit predestinatus, saluari necesse est.

Chapter 5 n. 52:

Peter Abelard, *Theologia 'Scholarium'* III.107, CCCM 13: 544:

... et omne peccatum magis uoluntarium quam necessarium sit et ex libero procedens arbitrio, non ex aliqua coactione naturae, uel diuinæ prouidentiae compulsionē.

Chapter 5 n. 62:

Peter Abelard, *Historia calamitatum*, ed. Monfrin, 1603–09:

Ex quo manifeste a iusticia eos recedere demonstrat quicumque pro aliquo sui gravamine his irascuntur que erga se diuina dispensatione geri non dubitant, et se proprie uoluntati magis quam diuine subiciunt, et ei quod in uerbis sonat: 'Fiat uoluntas tua' desideriis occultis repugnant, diuine uoluntati propriam antepponentes. Vale.

Chapter Six

Chapter 6 n. 62:

Bernard Silvestris, *Mathematicus*, ed. Stone, lines 107–10, *AHDLMA* 63 (1996): 234:

Nomen in ambiguo sed patricida uocetur
Imperat archana calliditate parens,
Ut iuuenis tantumque nefas tantumque furorem
Horreat audito nomine sepe suo.

Chapter 6 n. 63:

Bernard Silvestris, *Mathematicus*, ed. Stone, lines 629–640, *AHDLMA* 63 (1996): 266–268:

Dampnator cari capitis uiteque paterne
Ex rigida fati lege futurus erat
Mors patris et <meritis> et laudibus ingerit umbram
Multiplici superest unica culpa bono
Emptum morte uelit ut eodem limite posset
Finis principio concolor ire suo
Si fas sideribus si fas illudere parcis
Fata necemque patris preueniemus ait

Roma patricidam dici non esse uidebis
 Et mendax sensus nominis huius erit
 Nostra quid ethereis mens est cognatior astris
 Si dure lachesis triste necesse ferat.
 Frustra particulam diuine mentis habemus
 Si nequeat ratio nostra carere suo
 Sic elementa deus sic ignea sidera fecit
 Ut neque sideribus subditus esset homo
 Sed puri datur ingenii sollertia maior
 Possit ut obiectis obuius ire malis.

Chapter 6 n. 79:

Abelard, *Planctus* IV, ed. Dronke, in: *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages. New Departures in Poetry 1000–1150* (Oxford, 1970), 121:

Abissus vere multa
 Iudicia deus tua:
 Eo plus formidanda
 Quo magis sunt occulta
 Et quo plus est ad illa
 Quaelibet vis infirma!

Chapter 6 n. 82:

Bernard Silvestris, *Mathematicus*, ed. Stone, lines 850–55, *AHDLMA* 63 (1996): 280:

Sed quia muneribus uestri funguntur honores,
 Rex ideo uester desinit esse suus
 Pono citus trabeam uestrum, citus exuo regem
 Liber et explicitus ad mea uota meus.

Chapter Seven

Chapter 7 n. 8:

Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae* II 230–38, ed. Häring, 817:

Tunica uero polimita, opere picturata plumario, infra se corpus claudebat uirgineum. Que, multis stellata coloribus, in grossiorem materiam conglobata, in terrestris elementi faciem aspirabat. In huius uestis parte primaria homo, sensualitatis deponens segnicie, directa ratiocinationis aurigatione, celi penetrabat archana. In qua parte tunica, suarum partium passa dissidium, suarum iniuriarum contumelias demonstrabat. In reliquis tamen locis partes, eleganti continuatione concordantes, nullam diuisionis in se sustinebant discordiam. In quibus quedam picture incantatio terrestria animalia uiuere faciebat.

Chapter 7 n. 10:

Alan of Lille, *De planctu naturae* II, 196–98, ed. Häring, 816:

Sindo in uirorem adulterato candore quam puella inconsutiliter, ipsa postmodum dicente, texuerat, non plebea uilescens materia, artificio subtili lasciuiens, palli gerebat officium.

Chapter 7 n. 28:

Johannes Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* V, 1010 B–C, ed. Jeaneau, CCCM 165: 210:

O Domine Jesu, nullum aliud praemium, nullam aliam beatitudinem, nullum gaudium a te postulo, nisi ut ad purum absque ullo errore fallacis theoriae uerba tua, quae per tuum sanctum Spiritum inspirata sunt, intelligam. Haec est enim summa felicitatis meae, finisque perfectae est contemplationis, quoniam nihil ultra rationabilis anima etiam purissima inueniet, quia nihil ultra est.

Chapter 7 n. 36:

Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, ed. Bossuat, Prose Prologue 56:

In hoc etenim opere litteralis sensus suauitas puerilem demulcebit auditum, moralis instructio perficientem imbuet sensum, acutior allegorie subtilitas proficientem acuet intellectum.

Chapter 7 n. 43:

Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus* IX.410–26, ed. Bossuat, 197–98:

O mihi continuo multo sudata labore
 Pagina, cuius ad hoc minuit detractio famam,
 Viue, nec antiquos temptes equare poetas,
 Sed pocius ueterum uestigia semper adorans
 Subsequere et lauris humiles submitte miricas.
 Jam ratis, euadens Scillam monstrumque Caribdis,
 Ad portum tranquilla meat, jam littore gaudet
 Nauita, iam metam cursor tenet, anchora portum.
 Nauta tamen tremebundus adhuc post equoris estum
 Terrenos timet insultus, ne tutus in undis
 Naufragus in terra pereat, ne liuor in illum
 Seuiat aut morsus detractio figat in illo
 Qui iam scribendi studium pondusque laboris
 Exhaustit, proprio concludens fine laborem.
 Si tamen ad presens fundit sua murmura liuor,
 Et famam delere cupit laudesque poete
 Supplantare nouas, saltem post fata silebit.

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